MILLY AVELING

by

SARA TRAINER SMITH

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MILLY AVELING

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BY

SARA TRAINER SMITH

AUTHOR OF "OLD CHARLMONT'S SEED-BED," "FRED'S LITTLE DAUGHTER," ETC.

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MILLY AVELING.

CHAPTER I.

WHY THEY WENT.

"AND the doctors think she will never walk again?"

"They are afraid of it."

The two girls looked steadily at each other. The one who had answered put her hand over her eyes and her lip trembled.

"Poor, poor Milly!" exclaimed the other in an awed, hushed voice, and with a slow, dismayed look around the room. There was nothing there to explain her consternation—a pretty, simple, sunlit room under the roof of a country house, evidently the property of one or both of the sisters now occupying it.

"Dr. Morton says she may live for years—but he doesn't think she will—without being able to stand or even to rise from her chair. She must have a wheeled chair, and must be forced to sit up for a little while each day, or she will lose the power of doing it, and oh! it is such agony for her to be moved."

She had uncovered her eyes and was busy unpacking and laying away the contents of a light traveling bag, the

other had carried, passing from dressing-table to wardrobe and washstand with quick nervous movements which betrayed agitation.

"When did it happen, Helena?"

"Last Sunday. She has not been well since she came, but she said nothing and went about as usual; but I watched her all the time for some sign of a break down. One night—I think it was Wednesday—she cried a long time after we went to bed. I knew she thought I was asleep, but I wasn't, and I listened as long as I could without making any sign, trying what to make up my mind to do. The doctor said I spoiled her, and weakened her will by petting and coddling her, and I did not want to do that, so I thought I would try the other way. Finally, I spoke as sharply as possible. I said I would not stand any more such nonsense—it was ridiculous. If there was anything to cry for, she should just come out and say so, and, if I could, I would help her, and, if I couldn't, I would tell mother next morning, and see what she could do."

The other girl smiled a very little smile.

"I think I hear you!" she said softly.

"Indeed, then, I was hateful! She stopped crying at once, and lay very still. So I felt awfully sorry, and coaxed her to tell me what ailed her, and, after a while, she said it was her back, and, oh, she was so tired! It tired her so to keep holding herself still from trembling all the time. That frightened me, for I knew no one ought to feel that way. But I cheered her up as well as I could, and said it was only nervousness after last winter, and we would go in town and see the doctor the very

next morning and he would stop it—and all like that, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"But we didn't go the next morning, nor the next, for she seemed quite bright and said nothing about going, so I thought maybe it *was* nervousness and would go off without the doctor. But on Saturday, we went into the Art Exhibition, and I saw the trembling myself. I saw the program in her hand shaking like a leaf, and, then, her walk, and all seemed to go wrong at once. I pulled her hand through my arm, and, fortunately, we were just around the corner from the doctor's. The minute we walked in, he asked how long this had been going on, and when she told him, he only said to me to take her home and put her to bed, and keep her there until he said she might get up. He would be out home, he said, as soon as we were. She was just as cool as possible, and when we got off the car at the bridge, she said she was so glad they had not met us, for she would like to walk home *once* more."

"Oh, Helena, how dreadful! The locust walk will seem haunted!"

"Well, we *did* walk. I got her home and up-stairs and into bed, I don't know how. Mother was at Bloomsbury with Aunt Margaret—she is on, did you know?—but after that, I felt she was safe, and when the doctor came, he did not seem anxious; he said it had happened before, years ago—before she went to the convent. It was that way for a week—until the next Sunday. She trembled, trembled all the time, day and night, and I began to feel as if I should go wild if I could not get away

from the sight of her poor, patient face and her poor, little, tight-clenched hands. You know, she tried to keep still; although she knew perfectly well she could not do it, she had to try."

"Oh, Helena, how could you bear it!"

"It was Milly—I wouldn't have left her for the world. And people did not seem to notice it when they came in, because her father was so quiet always."

"Oh, was he here? What a good thing!"

"Yes, wasn't it? He came down as soon as he heard from mother, and he is still here. Well, it was Sunday—the Sunday week after we were at the doctor's, and I was reading to her after dinner. The room was quiet and sunny, and the fire was burning clear, and the book was interesting, and, altogether, I felt quite hopeful, when she said she thought it would rest her to sit up in her father's armchair, if it were only for a minute. I told her she had been so good and obedient for a whole week, that I didn't believe it would do any harm, if I pushed the chair close to the bed and helped her into it. So I did it. I pushed the chair as close as I could, and she sat up and put her feet on the floor. Then I put my arm around her, —and in one second she dropped perfectly helpless and I felt her slipping away from me."

"Oh, Helena!"

"I pulled her up as well as I could and ran and called her father out of his room. As soon as she saw him, she said, quietly: 'I don't know what it is, papa. It is something quite different from anything else, but don't be frightened. It doesn't hurt me.' He took her in his arms, and laid her straight on her pillows, and kissed her

once. Then he hurried off for the doctor. They are the bravest people! Neither of them will ever show what he or she feels for fear it may worry the other."

She had finished with the bag in the interval of her story, and now sat on the bed, like a bird ready for flight and restless.

"From that time until this she has lain—like one dead. She can not move from her neck down, except that she can lift one hand, sometimes, a very little way. The doctors have been here in shoals; they have done everything they can think of, but nothing brings any change. She does not suffer while she lies still—not even their experiments can hurt her—but when they try to raise her to sit up, the pain is dreadful. So—I wrote you to come home." She finished abruptly and uncertainly.

"Of course, I should be at home. The idea of mother and you doing all there must be to do——"

"Yes—but—it wasn't that. I wanted to see—to talk to you."

"I wonder why you did not write for me sooner. You only said she wasn't well, and you know,—she never has been *that* since we knew her."

"No."

"What are they going to do now? Not go back to the boarding-house?"

"No, they can not. The doctors—and, for once, they all agree—say that the only hope for her is to go at once to some quiet place, mountain or seaside, and, if it agrees with her at all, stay there. Dr. Morton—he's her own doctor—says she must not go for weeks or for months, but for years. That is to be the understanding. He

thinks that will give her a sense of rest and stability that will help her, because the dreadful strain of last winter, and the always looking for something nerve-destroying and painful to witness, brought this on, and she must not even look for a sudden noise or a change of any kind. At least, that's the way it sounded to me when I heard him talking to mother, and, I am sure, after the last two weeks of always fearing I don't know what, I can understand such a cure as that."

"It will be a great change for her. She has never lived in the country in her life, has she?"

"While she was at the convent."

"Oh, that's not living—not *home!* That's an ideal existence, you know."

"But this is not the country, Frank. It is to be the seaside or the mountains. Think of it!"

There was a silence, brief but living.

"Have you been thinking of it, Helena? Is that what you wanted to talk to me about?"

"Frank, you are the quickest creature! Yes, I did want to talk of it."

"You don't want to go with her—to nurse her, not even if it is Milly. You couldn't. You are not strong enough."

"No, I know I am not, but——"

"But I am!"—springing to her feet. "There is where it lies, the whole thing in a nutshell! You will go, Helena! And I shall go! And Mrs. Edward Marsden will go! I see it all in a flash."

"Oh, Frank, how can you? Mother has never thought of such a thing, and, really, it will be an undertaking for

her—for us. It wouldn't be all roses and lilies, you know. Housekeeping in a strange place in warm weather, and with an invalid—and we are pretty lazy and ease-loving."

"I have never seen the time when it *was* all roses and lilies. And housekeeping in warm weather has its drawbacks, even when you have lived in the place since Adam was oakum boy in Chatham dockyard, as father used to say. As for the invalid,—it couldn't be half as hard for any one else as it will be for her. And it is Milly, too."

"Yes, it is Milly."

There was a wistfulness in Helena's voice and eye that pleaded for this dear Milly, although she conscientiously set forth all the drawbacks of the plan she and her sister had at once seized upon as "the best thing to be done."

"Dreams, idle dreams!" suddenly exclaimed Frank, stopping in the middle of a sentence. "And all the time, Mr. Aveling will arrange it to suit Mr. Aveling, and Mrs. Edward Marsden may respectfully decline to let her daughters rule her life, be it ever so comfortably for her. But—if it can be done, we go to Gray Beach, Helena. To Gray Beach, and I keep the house, and you keep the house, and I nurse Milly and you amuse her, and our mother and our friend get all the good out of this summer it has in it for them, and we get all we ought to have. It will be that discipline you are so fond of wishing you had, without the trouble of getting it. Eh, Helena?"

"Don't call it by such a hard name! I am sure I ought to be forever ashamed of myself if I should not find pleasure in caring for that dear, patient, loving creature. It ought to be only pleasure."

"But, Helena—you're 'real nice,' as Douce Davy Dawkins says of you, but you are—lazy. Now, own up, won't you? And—can I see Milly?"

"Oh, yes! She's in the west room. Oh, but I am glad to have you home once more! And I never asked you how they were, but never mind now! We can talk all we like later on."

She opened the door into a narrow passage, and led the way to a room on the other side of it. It was a larger room, and furnished with newer and handsomer furniture, and having the added charm of an old-fashioned grate, in which still burned—although it was April—a bright fire. It was a high, projecting grate, throwing its glow well over the room, and over the white draped bed upon which rested a shadow felt, though unseen. A very delicate, pale, dark-eyed face looked up from a pillow that scarcely raised the curly head from the line of the recumbent figure—looked up with a calm serenity that would have moved the strongest heart, knowing all.

"Oh, Frank, is it you! Why, no one told me you were here. I thought Helena must be out. How well you look! Come closer to me that I may get a good look. Have you come home to stay?"

It was easier for Frank to smile brightly as she moved around the bed than to speak naturally.

"You were having a lovely time, I could see in every line of your last letter, and Helena did not say you were coming."

"She did not tell me you were ill until her last letter. Of course, I came after that."

"It was too bad to come upon them for a visit only,

and then put them to such trouble. The very thing Helena hates most, too. Has she told you all of it?"

"Yes, we have had time for quite a long talk," said Frank, hurriedly. "The doctors were here—they came in the train with me. Oh, I have such lots of things to tell you! And I have lots of violets for you, too, from the Bloomsbury girls. They caught me on the way up from the station, and Kitty said I should tell you the boys were all off to college now, and she could protect her beds, and you are to have plenty. Let me get them!"

She hurried out, and Helena, following her in a minute or two, found her sobbing on the stairs.

"Oh, it's too, too dreadful for anything! So young and so bright and like death itself! Oh, Helena, we *must* take care of her—you'll have to do it yourself, if it can't be managed the other way. She never, never can be left to strangers."

That was the beginning of it—the way they came to go.

CHAPTER II.

WHO THEY WERE AND WHERE THEY WENT.

Mrs. Edward Marsden and her two daughters had always lived at Roseburn, the home that had been hers from her birth, as it had been her mother's before her. Mr. Marsden, coming from another hemisphere, but always "like one of ourselves" to the Loring family after Margaret married him, had made Roseburn his home after a roving life, and sometimes there, sometimes at the other end of the earth, had made it, on the whole, a very happy and comfortable home for his wife and "babies," as he called his daughters even yet. At the time of Milly Aveling's sudden seizure, he was in South America, where he had gone to establish a business enterprise which should crown his life of exertion, and which would require another year of absence. During that absence—the first for a long time—Mrs. Marsden had brought her daughters home from their convent school, for she was really too lonely and too delicate to be left to the care of servants alone. Together, they had passed a busy, earnest year, not the less happy because they had Milly Aveling with them much of the time.

The Avelings were a lonely pair.

Their family had never numbered more than three, and that so long ago Milly could only dimly recall the

time. A delicate mother and a delicate child, the two had so softened the sterner and fiercer nature of the third that by the time the mother faded out of life, the father alone was fitted to care for the child. Hers was a peculiar and sensitive organization, which she could neither explain nor control, but which he accepted with perfect and tender confidence. They got on admirably together, and loved each other fondly. She was a quiet little thing, shy beyond words, and, yet, she could be strangely and bravely obstinate at times. Left to herself, she went on harmlessly enough, but she had antipathies, and suspicions, and unconscious impulses toward things of which she knew nothing, that would have made the life of any stranger having her in charge a path of thorns and pitfalls. Mr. Aveling knew this, and kept his own counsel, and took his own way. With a staid old nurse, and a cool-headed, sensible landlady, he boarded year after year in a quiet, well-kept boarding-house. Milly was carefully nursed through her many attacks of illness, dressed with due attention to simple good taste, taken on visits here and there to different relatives—they all lived at a distance from the city where were centered all Mr. Aveling's business interests—and left safely to herself in many ways. Lonely she certainly was, but lonely she must have been in the most crowded home where he could have placed her during that childhood. Her mother had sufficed for her. No one could fill her place, but her father—left entirely to her—made a place for himself that satisfied her. And, at the proper time, she had one of her impulses. Just when he began to feel anxious as to the next step, she chose to go to

school, and chose to go to St. Hilda's, a mountain eyrie that chained her fancy on the way to her father's old home. By no means a Catholic, Mr. Aveling was not averse to the idea on inquiry, and was well pleased to leave her in perfect safety, in a healthy atmosphere, physical, mental, and moral. There she met Helena Marsden, and, from the first, they had found what they loved in each other. Helena was the elder of the two, but Milly was older than her years, and the dependence her delicate childhood had fostered to complete reliance, in one way, on those near her who were kindest to her, leaned with unquestioning trust on the bright, yet placid, nature of her companion. Frank was also at school, and the three had looked forward to several years longer of intercourse and study, when the Marsdens were summoned home. Milly had continued at school without them, for there was now stamina and strength in the still delicate creature to struggle with herself, make the best of what was really very good, and gain all she could from it. But she had been put to a new school and had harder tasks set her. Her father was taken very ill, and she was hurried home with little hope that he would ever need her. Instead of sudden and hopeless grief, however, there followed a long period of helpfulness and sympathy with his sufferings. With perfect unselfishness and a girl's innocent ignorance of her own strength or weakness, she devoted herself to him day and night for weeks, watching and nursing him with growing skill that cast a new light on her character and abilities, and with exhaustive energy, that had resulted in her present condition. Her father had been going leisurely to business for several

weeks, and had, indeed, been out of danger since the first of the year. The greater part of that time she had been coming and going with Helena, now at Roseburn for a day or two, and now returning to the city with Helena as her guest. The regular visit during which she had been prostrated was one made while Frank was away with her "chum," a time that could not be passed in loneliness by Mrs. Marsden. Fortunately, Roseburn was but a few miles distant from the city of the Avelings' residence, and her father was thus within easy reach when she needed him, and able to remain at her side except at suitable times, when he could leave her to attend to the business that he was putting in order for an absence on his part, intended to entirely restore his shattered health.

Roseburn was a lovely old place. The house was large enough for comfort, but without pretensions. Older than the other residences of the family—for the Lorings had a settlement in the county as old as the first settlers—it had a simple, quiet beauty, and the advantage, in a place where the summers are so warm, of a great deal of shade, many vines and a stately grove of old trees. Mr. Marsden had brought from his many voyages and enterprises a number of quaint and curious and beautiful things to adorn the house, outside and within, and not a few foreign customs and fancies had been grafted on Mrs. Marsden's old-fashioned "family ways." It was a delightful place to visit, for more than Milly Aveling, who was at home there.

Still, the Marsden girls would not have been sorry many a time to have left Roseburn for "a change." But one of the old-fashioned ways Mrs. Marsden had never

modified was the belief that people were most comfortable in their own home. She was most hospitable, always ready for "company," and she treated a guest like royalty itself. But she hated boarding and boarders, even at a summer hotel. She never had any trouble with her servants, therefore she was never broken down and worn out. Any delicacy of constitution she had to contend with had not faced in the direction of "nervous prostration."

Thus with all Frank Marsden's sympathy for their friend and with honest devotion to her, she was conscious that there might be an outlook towards the realization of her favorite dream in this plan of hers and Helena's. A summer at the seashore! And her mother could not say it would be wasted and useless with such an object in view. Thankful indeed that it seemed to lie directly in the path of duty, it was not many hours before she skilfully introduced Milly's affliction, her present needs and possible future.

"Helena says the doctors insist on her going away," she said to her mother, as they sat talking it over—the delight of their life was the "talking over" what interested them—"but who is to go with her? She certainly needs some one more than her father now. Old Susan cannot nurse her—she's too old—and she is miserable with strangers in the best of times. Any one he might get would only add to her nervousness."

Her mother assented, and then they pitied her for that. Frank was a wise woman for her years. She knew that pity would lead her mother far along the path love would have trodden for the best beloved, and, together,

they were soon all warm sympathy and earnest anxiety to provide for the dear, suffering girl. What Frank and Helena had only sketched, Frank and her mother worked out in detail, supposing Mr. Aveling agreed.

They could take a cottage at the seashore for the year of Mr. Marsden's absence, at least. Milly could have all the attention she might need exactly as either of them would have had it in her own home under the same conditions, and she would certainly be happier and more at rest with them than with any one else, to say nothing of the constant companionship of Helena. They could consult her every want, and need not go far from Dr. Morton. Above all, they must be where Mr. Aveling could reach her often.

"And at the end of the year, if she has to stay longer and we have to come home, she will know exactly what she wants, and it will be easier to find it. She—she may be ever so much better," but Frank's voice shook a little, "or she may even be quite well," with a defiant cheerfulness, "for I don't think doctors know everything every time, do you, mother?"

"They make some mistakes. And a year is a long time. It means many, many things we hope for as well as many things we dread."

"Then, you will talk to Mr. Aveling about it when he begins worrying over Milly?"

"I certainly shall. One thing, dear! We must make sure of a church and a priest. I will not go anywhere where they are not. And Mr. Aveling may not think it important."

"Mother, you shall go to Gray Beach. I have set my

heart on that, and I know there is a lovely church among the pines, for I saw it in the two hours' visit there. When it comes to discussing places, let me have my say."

It came to that no later than the next morning.

Mr. Aveling came down from the city on the evening train, depressed and anxious beyond his usual custom. The doctors and he had had a long and exhaustive interview, and they had insisted upon what it seemed impossible for him to do. Where could he take his poor child? Who was there to look up places, weigh their advantages and disadvantages, consult her dislikes and her desires, nurse her, amuse her, prevent her brooding and anticipating evil? And, yet, the doctors had repeated most decidedly: It is the only hope for her. "If she could only stay with you, Mrs. Marsden!" he exclaimed. "Of course I know it is impossible, but, really, I cannot but think it would be better for her here than among strangers, either on the mountains or at the seashore. But I know it is impossible."

"Not at all impossible, Mr. Aveling. If we can make it practicable——"

"Mrs. Marsden, you don't mean it!"

The evident relief of the faintest hope was enough to have touched Mrs. Marsden's heart, had it been needed. But she did mean it, and the two plunged at once into such a discussion of ways and means as could not but lead to harmonious results, and which was only broken in upon by Milly's preparations for the night, when her father was called to lay her comfortably among her pillows—a thing no one else could do so well.

It was resumed the next morning in full family con-

clave, Mr. Aveling's eagerness evidently tempered only by the fear that a night's reflection might have changed Mrs. Marsden's mind. But a night's sleeping on it and a short talk with Frank while dressing had kindled anew their enthusiasm.

"Oh, mother, you don't know how lovely it is! So fresh and pure and bracing, and so quiet! It is the beauty of the sea I want, and not the people. I am sure, I have had enough of people here! It will be a relief to live where you have a minute to call your own, and where there is time between trains when no one can come in on you unexpectedly. I do hate to live in public. Yet I like a real good time with people when it suits."

"I think I shall like it," said her mother, with a relish. "And I am sure it will be the very place for Milly. I remember now hearing many things of Gray Beach in its praise."

"And, mother, Helena and I are to do everything. It will be such a chance for us to learn without putting you out of your ways. And you can have such a rest—reading and fancy work and writing to father all day long. You will remember, won't you?"

Mrs. Marsden was ready to go down-stairs, and forgot to answer.

They settled before they left the breakfast table. Frank was to go at once to Gray Beach, looking for a cottage. Mr. Aveling was to make inquiries as to one or two other places of which he had heard the day before, and they would decide between them.

"It must be a cottage large enough for all to be com-

fortable," said Mrs. Marsden, after the stipulation had been made regarding the church and the priest.

"I don't care for any finery in the way of architecture, but I do want room."

"But not for all," said Mr. Aveling. "I begin to see my way clear through a very dark passage. I had a plan to go out to join Mr. Marsden, and had just begun to formulate it. It is most important to me—and I think to him—that it should be carried out, for I have lost more than health in last winter's sickness, and there is a promise of gaining more than health if we combine forces. If I leave Milly with you, I can go with an easy mind, and return, I am sure, with Mr. Marsden at an earlier date than he anticipates. We shall have all our treasure in one casket, here as well as there, and both be freer to act."

"Frank, you must be quick! You have half an hour," said her mother. There was perfect unison in this house on all subjects on that day.

When Frank walked in briskly from the train the next day, she swung her umbrella with a careless ease that was quite manly and independent.

"Well, ladies, I was right in all my predictions," she said, with dimples coming and going around her merry lips, for all her assumption of nonchalance. "You are all going to Gray Beach the first of May—ten days from to-day."

"And I suppose you stay to take care of Roseburn?" questioned her mother, with comic gravity.

"I? Not at all. I shall be at Gray Beach several days before that, and you are to find all things 'in order meet' when you arrive."

CHAPTER III.

GRAY BEACH.

It was not a fashionable resort. A few summer cottages scattered irregularly along the bluff, a summer hotel with many porches, gray and unadorned as the bath-houses on stilts at the edge of the sands, a village of one wide street, pretty and foreign-looking from either end of its short length—this is Gray Beach. But it is beautiful, for it has the bluff and the pines and Great Bay.

The cottages and the village are separated by a stretch of grass grown level on which the hotel has settled down at a comfortable distance from either, and behind the three lie the pine woods, growing taller and thicker and darker as they sweep away into the northwest horizon. Great Bay is beyond them, so wide and deep that its waves seem boundless as the ocean on the other side, and those early risers who care to see the sun rise gloriously from the waters on the east have only to walk up the village street, and through the pines at sunset to watch it sink as gloriously into the waters of the west. Tangled thickets and bowers of thick-leaved vines, tall grasses and still, clear ponds, are everywhere without the cottage gardens and the village limits, and away to the north, the salt meadows stretch endlessly. Far across them, the roofs and towers and steeples of a great, gay summer city glow in the sunset mists of a clear evening like those of an enchanted land.

The cottage which Frank had chosen for them was near the ocean and midway of the group upon the bluff. It was a large, square, flat-roofed and gaily painted house, with a lookout on top and a pleasant garden below, in which there was even an oak tree on the inland side. It was very close to the house, and rather a dwarf in spite of its shelter, but it was still young, and very green and fresh, early as it was in the season for "green things growing." Every window in the house seemed to have an ocean view, for a curve in the beach just here showed the heaving and tossing waters within a hundred yards of those on the east, while the north front looked down a wide, straight avenue directly into the waves curling and breaking on the beach, half a mile away. On the south and west there were glimpses of the bay from the upper windows, where the village roofs and the tossing pines made rifts of brightness. There was but one sound, varied as the hours of the day—the music of the waves, rising and falling with the tides, lapping softly or swelling gradually to a thunderous roar.

"If it had been made for Milly it could not have been more exactly what is wanted!" exclaimed her father, when he saw it for the first time.

He went down with Frank and the maids to make a list of essentials needed, and arrange for all the comforts he could think of in a busy three hours. Two days later, he returned with Milly and Helena, Mrs. Marsden remaining with a double or treble purpose. In the first place, she wished to close the house at Roseburn and see that Terence and Mary were established there; in the second place, Frank had begged to be allowed to get

"fixed and started" before her mother entered upon the scene where her daughters were to keep house for her instead of her keeping it for them as had always been the case; in the third place, she had an idea that it would be all the better for Milly to remember Roseburn open and cheerful and homelike as she had always seen it, instead of changed and gloomy as it would look at the last, if they all left it at the same time. As it was, the last look Milly carried away with her beheld the flower-shaded windows, the cheerful glow of the fire within, and Mrs. Marsden in her dainty house-dress waving a bright "good speed" from the open door.

It was after dark when they reached Gray Beach, and it had been a strange and unreal journey for all of them. Everything had been done to prepare Milly for it in the interval after the decision was made, and she had exerted herself as usual to the utmost to obey doctor, nurses, and her father. When it was thought best, she had been quiet for hours at a time, sleepless but with closed eyes. She had borne uncomplainingly the training to sit up, and had progressed from half a minute in her father's arms—the tears of agony rolling down her cheeks, and Helena marking the time, watch in hand—to five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes at a time in the wheeled chair that was couch and stretcher as well. But that she was enduring a terrible strain and that her nerves had been shattered almost beyond her control, became more and more evident. Although silent, she was wild to get away, panting and breathless with longing, as it were, although no one knew why, and she least of all.

The hour of departure came at last, and too helpless to

be dressed, folded in blankets on her chair-bed, and veiled from curious eyes, she was carried from her room to the carriage, driven into the city by slow stages, and placed on the train. There, contrary to all their fears, she was quite comfortable. The compartment that had been engaged for her was next the baggage car, and the official in charge was a fatherly and chivalrous soul to whom her helpless youth appealed strongly. He was, moreover, an American of Americans—one of those, that is, who would do all the good possible to king or beggar as he came in his way, with no other thought than that of doing good as he knew he could. With kindly warmth and sympathy that was not intrusive, he made his way into the anxious little group as they gathered round her, and with quiet suggestion and a powerful arm, moved the chair, and shifted it until it swayed with the vibrations of the train, and so secured it that she scarcely felt the motion. Then he managed to shield her from intrusion and, with the other employees, to stand guard between her and curiosity, and all with a consideration and delicacy the others shared. At some woodland station on the long ride, the train stopped a weary while, but when it started he came in with a great bunch of wild spring blossoms, sweet and frail as any pure-souled sufferer, and laid them on her helpless fingers very carefully and gently.

"Now, don't you say that the pine woods didn't welcome you with the promise of better things," he said, kindly. "The good Lord who made *them* won't forget *you*, either, when he shelters you among them."

And Milly, shrinking and fastidious, timid with stran-

gers in health and reserved even towards her nearest and dearest as to any utterance of her deeper thoughts, understood and accepted the comfort of his simple words, and thanked him with a smile that almost brightened her pale and pensive face.

It was he who thought of telegraphing for something other than the usual hack or wagon to meet them at their journey's end. There would be a drive of several miles—all the way, indeed, from the gay city by the sea across the salt meadows—and he spoke of a wagon large enough to carry the wheeled chair at full length ; he could order such a one and he did.

It was waiting when they arrived, and, with all tenderness and kindness, she was lifted by strange hands into its capacious, canvas-covered depths, and set face towards her new home with a shower of good wishes and many an unspoken prayer from stranger hearts to accompany her. There is a great deal of curiosity in the world, but it is none the less a fact that it goes hand-in-hand more often than we know with blessed charity and heaven-born sympathy. When it does not, man or woman, boy or girl, who finds within his or her heart the first inkling of a curiosity which is not kindly, and which would not spend or be spent to heal or to help where misfortune of any kind awakens it, may hide in disgrace from the eyes of all fellow-men. Only God can pity or bear with the curious and unkindly, so little and so mean are they to all who do not and cannot see the whole story of a life at once.

The ride across the salt meadows was less successful than the journey by rail. It was rugged and broken in

the roadway, not level on the side track, and impossible to brace or place the chair securely. Exhausted, excited, timid and unprepared for it in every way, Milly lay as on the rack. Her father knelt supporting her, and Helena did her best to relieve her from a single jolt or jar, but a thrill of actual relief shot through every one, when the driver pointed across the gray level to a glowing, gleaming row of windows with the announcement:

"There's your house now! That's Ocean Cottage."

The wheels tracked smoothly from that minute, and with a bold sweep, the wagon soon drew up at the open gate of the pretty little yard. Frank was on the porch, and the maids in the open doorway, while Albert—"Albert the Right Hand," as the girls called him—was already on the green before the gate, his homely black face a most familiar greeting.

Five minutes more, and Milly was laid upon her own bed in a white chamber, where the stillness and the freshness and the remembrance of the wide sky and the wide sea and the fresh, fair earth around her brought to her a sense of peace and rest long unknown.

"It is over!" she exclaimed with fervent thankfulness in the very tone. "Now—*now* I can be quiet!"

And they knew Dr. Morton was right in the cure on which he placed all his hope.

The first night was a very curious one to all of them. The lower story had been prepared for them, with a view to Milly's convenience, should she soon be able to go out in her chair, or even from room to room on the same floor, and there was a sense of unrest in the very fact that they were down-stairs instead of up-stairs at bedtime.

Milly was the first to sleep, for she was tired to exhaustion, but Helena wandered from room to room and from window to window until dawn, half frightened, half fascinated by the weird lights, the wide sky, the shadowless pallor of night on the brink of the ocean. Then there was a strange, alternate darkening and lightening of the heavens and all beneath them that confused her. Did she or did she not see more clearly sometimes than others? She surely did, for the shadow and the light passed onward and returned in regular, slow succession as she watched and debated. It was like the sweep of mighty wings—an angel of light passing from darkness to darkness with a blessing and never growing weary. In an instant, it flashed upon her—the lighthouse with its revolving light. She had forgotten it, but there is one at Gray Beach, and so near the group of cottages that they hide its tower from each other, tall as it is. But over their roofs, the mighty radiance streams forth and marks its presence to the dwellers under its very eaves no less than to the sea-rocked wanderer.

The thought of this sleepless watcher brought peace. It was good to lie thus under the shadow of its wings, the glorious shadow. And from an open-eyed dream of the angel of light and his messengers, Helena slipped into a slumber-vision of those great wings coming to the white chamber and its inmate "with healing in their radiance and blessing in their shadow."

She found the next day that Albert was the only one of the household who had shared her terrors in any way, and she alone could sympathize with the poor fellow when he attempted to unburden his soul. To be sure, they

were accustomed long before to take Albert's confidences with a discount. He was an odd character for whose introduction they were indebted to their father, who had found him penniless, fever-stricken and homesick unto death in the far West, and had brought him home with him. Long since, he had become "Albert the Right Hand" to them, a regularly constituted "emergency man" upon whom they called for any extra service required. He was born a slave, the property of "my ole Mis"—he never gave her any other name—and she had raised him "in de house," half pet and half page, until she died and he was freed by the war. The two things occurred about the same time, and Albert must have been a well grown lad, although they had no means of arriving at his exact age. But he had learned many things from "ole Mis" which he never wasted time in forgetting. He could wash and iron, cook and clean, act as coachman, gardener, night-watchman, waiter-boy, and Pullman palace car porter. He had been nurse in a hospital, gentleman's body servant, whitewasher, policeman, painter, and telegraph messenger. In short, Albert was always ready, always wanting something to do, always obedient, always penniless, and always grumbling when alone—or when he thought himself alone—and with it all, he was still by nature and at heart the old-fashioned slave. He must "belong" to some "folks," and forthwith adopted the Marsden family. In all their interests he had a share, in all their misfortunes he was a mourner, and in all their successes he was a tinkling cymbal of delight and praise. Frank had brought him with her at his own request, he feeling assured—with a good deal of jus-

tice—that they two could make the desert wilderness of a rented cottage blossom like the rose of home "in less dan no time."

"Miss Helena," he said, the next day, the first time he could sidle up to her and open one of his confidential communications, "does yer like dis yer Gray Beach? Does yer raley now?"

"Indeed, I do! Why? Don't you like it?"

"I sutinly does not," with a mysteriously solemn shake of the head. "Dat dar sea—I hain't never seed no sea 'fore dis yer one—I sutinly don't like hit!"—with strong emphasis.

"Why, Albert!" broke in Frank, who was close at hand, "you never said anything about it before. I thought you were getting on remarkably well. You haven't even grumbled when you thought I couldn't hear you."

"Now den, Miss Frank! you please don't say notin' 'bout dat. I dess naterally has to talk dat way when I bleeged to be my lonesome self. An yis'day, I hain't seed hit yit. But las' night I seed hit! You min' dat now."

He was walking out of the room in great stateliness, carrying his dishes before him as the royal crown of Great Britain is borne before Her Majesty the Empress of Great Britain and the Indies, and his very oracular lips tight shut above his secret.

"Oh, Albert! Stop! Tell us what you saw."

"I hain't got no time to stop now, Miss Frank. You know I dess got to quit dis yer foolin'. Dar's Miss Milly —she waitin' on you ladies."

"But, Albert, what did you see?" interposed Helena, in her quieter and more yielding tones.

"Well, Miss Helena, dat dar way it keeps a lightin' up an' a lightin' up an' a lightin' up. Dat is sutinly cur'ous. An' I don't like it nohow."

"The lighthouse, Helena!" exclaimed Frank, after a minute's thought, during which he had marched away. "He thinks it the sea flashing. Well, I must own that would be rather mysterious and alarming. But I wonder he did not see it before last night. Oh! we had a fog."

"I shall certainly explain it to him to-night," said Helena, secretly sympathizing.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT THEY FOUND THERE.

"AND now that we are here, Frank, and you have almost made the house over again into our home, I want you to tell me something about the places and the people. Where is the church, to begin with ?"

"There, under the steeple," taking her by the arm and turning her towards the pine woods, where the bluest of skies was pierced by a slender spire uplifting a shining cross. "St. Monica by the Sea. You never saw a more beautiful spot for a church. There is a priest's house close beside it, in a little garden of roses and honeysuckle, but I waited for you to go with me—or mother—to call on the priest."

"Well, I should think so !"

"But I have asked all the questions I could think of, and he seems a very round-about man. I mean, a man who is something different to every other man."

"Asked ? Whom have you asked ?"

"The butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker. Don't I know what it used to be around Roseburn before the fine city folks moved out in numbers and set up new fashions and new manners that spoiled it ? Then if you had asked any one for information you ought to have, any one would have given you a truthful and kindly answer. The butcher—that's the postmaster—told me he

was an old gentleman, very quiet and religious ; the baker—he's the storekeeper—says he's a young fellow, pretty sickly looking ; the candlestick-maker—meaning the carpenter—praises him as a stoutish kind of middle-aged man, who can preach like a house afire, and no mistake. Now, isn't that an all-around man, or a round-about man, whichever you like ? But they are not Catholics, the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker. I think very few of the people are, except in summer time. Those two cottages opposite to us are Catholic cottages, the carpenter told me, and, then, the priest's little house is used for rest and recuperation, even by the Bishop. Oh ! you needn't fear. You can go to church all summer. No slipping out of it and slipping over your conscience because the church is too far off, or the weather too wet or too windy or too warm or too anything. You'll just have to go, Helena, every time Sunday or a saint's day stares you in the face from the calendars."

"I am sure I always do go !" exclaimed Helena indignantly.

"But you don't always want to go, do you ? I know I don't. It makes no difference how much I preach to myself, nor how much I pretend to despise myself for it, I go on not wanting to, all the same. It does me good, though, to remember that as soon as I turn the first corner on the way to Mass, I would not go back for the world, and I never heard Mass in my life without being thankful I was there, thankful for every minute of the time. But "—with a sudden pause—" that's just where it is, isn't it ?"

" Where what is ?"

"Why, the reason for the commandment to hear Mass on every Sunday and holyday. If every one always wanted to go to Mass, there would never be any use for that commandment. They would all go every time they had the chance, don't you see? Well! that may be wisdom and it may not. It doesn't concern us, at any rate. There is the commandment and here we are; we know what we have to do and we shall do it. There is not a shadow of excuse for any of us—except Milly, and she wouldn't have to go if she was well."

The sisters were out for their first walk together, and they had turned inland. Each had tried the two beach paths—one up and one down—at the first minute possible after their arrival. Now, they had skirted the hotel—closed until the beginning of "the season"—on the wide, low porches, crossed the green on the other side, and reached the village street, where the steep-roofed cottages stood each in its trim garden, shell-bordered and vine-trellised. Even the village store stood back from the street, and from the broad, scrupulously swept middle way that led from the gate to the door, winding paths diverged to right and left through flowery vistas. No person appeared to disturb the impression of a sleeping population as they passed on into the woods and to the church.

It was gray, of course, with lancet windows of colored glass, and the little porch sheltered a finely-arched gothic door of solid oak. There was a small, smooth green before the door which showed careful attention.

The door yielded to a touch and they entered where all was churchlike, serene, and peaceful in a golden atmosphere where the very motes hung motionless. The eastern

window over the altar bore a single device—the Sacred Heart on a white background, and the altar beneath it was fair and fine. It was of solid oak, also, graceful in form and simple, but perfectly adorned with carving. A silver sanctuary lamp burned before the tabernacle, and they knelt reverently, putting aside curiosity and criticism until they had done homage. "Isn't it pretty?" exclaimed Frank, when they turned homeward after a survey of the surroundings and of the priest's house, nestling among vines, its wide veranda comfortably set forth with rustic chairs, one of which held the edition of the priest as described "pretty sickly looking." "Do you know, a church in the wilderness—well, this does seem like a wilderness—is always more churchlike than a church in the city? It is so pure and unsullied, so fragrant and suggestive of holiness all around it. But, then, a city church is more needed. Think of the sick hearts and sad hearts and stained hearts that are carried into a city church every day! It is sentiment to feel as I do about a country church."

"Is there anything wrong in sentiment?" questioned Helena. "The thing is to reverence and value a church wherever you find one, I think. But a thought came to me in there. Do you remember that legend—or, was it only a saying of old?—that Father Faber mentions in one of his books, about Our Lord going to and fro over the earth during the forty days before His Ascension, and touching with His sacred feet every spot on which there was ever to be an altar? I thought He must have *rested* when He stood here. It was a comfort to think it. I so often think of rest as a blessing now. I never used to

care for it at all, and I don't need it now. But—being with Milly——"

She broke off abruptly.

"Yes, I know," said Frank. "Being with Milly makes a difference in many things. I never used to think of anything but having a real good time, but now——"

And she, too, paused. They walked on in silence for some time, and then began to note features of the village to report to Milly. She had improved in the two or three days she had been there, and, still at full length on her chair, was wheeled in to the table to dinner or to lunch as suited her. To lie there listening and occasionally joining in the merry chatter was a change from the sick-room habit which had not yet become second nature to her before it was disturbed.

"Do look at Albert, will you!" exclaimed Frank. "Where can he have been? He is a walking nosegay."

He was coming toward them on the beach with his grandest air, weighed down with an enormous bouquet of lilac, green cedar sprays, and some branches of yellow blossoms, delicately starring long brown twigs. His face was on a broad grin, yet wore an expression best characterized as sheepish.

"He's been up to some mischief, I know," said Frank. "Telling stories of some sort. I never can teach him to tell the truth, whether he means it or not."

Helena stopped and Albert came to a halt, turning his bouquet insinuatingly to and fro, without a word.

"Where did you get those flowers, Albert? Do they grow around here? Oh! how sweet they are."

"Dey's for Miss Milly."

"Are they? She will be so pleased to get them—a breath of spring, indeed. But where did you get them? I would really like to know if they belong here."

"'Deed dey does. Dey belongs to de little lady in de gray house wid de blue rim round de shuttahs. She's de littles' lady I eber see, 'ceptin' dat Yankee lady dat hadn' a teaspoonful of grease in her whole body. You 'members her, Miss Frank?"

"I remember Mrs. Darnley, if you mean her. How came this lady to give you the flowers? Did she say they were for Miss Milly?"

"Now, Miss Frank! In cose she didn' say dat, but she say, didn' I come wid de Ocean Cottage folks, an' didn' der be a young lady or a young gal dat was sick, an' didn' I hab to say dat was Miss Milly? An' den she say she hab dese yer fer her. An' here dey is."

"How very kind!"

"What else did you say, Albert?"

"I didn' say nuffin', Miss Frank. I dess tole her much obleeged, an' our folks bery fon' ob flowers, an' de young ladies, dey do demselves de privilege ob callin' on her an' sayin' howdy rite smart soon, case our folks rigular quality folks. What you tink I say, Miss Frank? I hain't got time go bustin' about sayin' notin', nohow. I got ter git home rite now wid dis yer posy fer Miss Milly."

As he shuffled away, the girls looked at each other with expressive countenances.

"Helena!" said Frank, "if you encourage any of his nonsense down here, I shall be too angry at you. These people are strangers to us, and what will they think?"

"They ought not to think any harm of such courtesy

as that, I am sure. We shall have to live up to such trumpeting as his. I wonder what sort of a little lady we are engaged to call upon. Do you know the house he means ?"

"Yes, I think I do. It is not very near our own. He must have had quite a walk with his bouquet, for it is in quite the other direction, and you see he has turned off to cross country and get home before us. It is the only cottage down here that is open all winter. The lady lives in it all the year round, and enjoys every season in turn. She has it fitted up in rather odd, but very pretty, style. As Albert said, it is gray with 'blue rims round the shuttahs.' There is Milly on the porch with her bouquet before her. And there is mother !"

She flew off like a lapwing over the sands, and Helena followed her almost as swiftly. There was a perfect babel of voices for the next hour, and Milly held her own right gallantly in it. Mrs. Marsden saw the greatest change in her, and hope rose in each breast as they compared notes, and chatted over "here, there, and everywhere," and the people belonging to each place.

Albert's offering came in for its due notice. He had been more explicit with Milly, and a really kindly message had been sent by the little lady with her flowers. Again that evidence of compassion and interest in the sufferer, unknown and unheralded. The girls repeated Albert's introduction of "our folks" to the stranger, and the engagement into which he had entered for them.

"Shall we go, mother ?" asked Helena.

"I think not !" interrupted Frank.

"Indeed, I shouldn't wonder if you did go," decided

Mrs. Marsden. "I believe the lady is Miss Hilson, whose cousin I met yesterday at your Aunt Jane's. She seemed delighted to hear that her cousin would probably have neighbors of a more enduring quality than usual, and told me more pleasant things about Gray Beach. I promised to carry a message to Miss Hilson for her, and I must not keep it until it gets stale."

CHAPTER V.

MILLY'S FIRST CALLER.

As afterwards appeared, Albert had paraded the village, bouquet in hand, and had delivered several sidewalk orations as to its destination. The story of the "sick lady" went abroad with many variations, but one thing became fixed in all minds—her love of flowers. It was evidently one that the children of Gray Beach understood and shared with her. Scarcely a day passed now without an offering of some kind, usually left without a word of greeting or introduction, and by very small and grimy hands. Helena and Frank tried in vain to make acquaintance with their small neighbors. Milly asked question after question about them, and grew gently indignant because they could not answer them to her satisfaction.

"I candidly confess," said Frank, "that I am afraid of children. I am shy with them, and I am shy with no other class of people in the world. But they look at you with such solemn eyes, and they may take you down any minute with some remark too awfully truthful or too blandly outrageous for anything. I suppose these are like other children, but they look wiser."

"Wiser? Is that it?" questioned Helena. "They certainly do stare at you in dumb silence as if they were taking notes of your good and bad qualities in utter amaze-

ment. But there is one little beauty, Milly. I wish you could see her."

"I will see her," decided Milly at last, to the surprise of all. She had been painfully shy hitherto, shrinking from the sight of every one but "our folks," and not to be persuaded to go out on the beach in her chair, be the sun and the balmy breeze ever so tempting. Unlike Frank, she was neither afraid of children, nor shy with them. She had that power of attraction which always makes it easy to control them, and to bring out all that is in them at its best. And it was to the children she was to owe the quickening interest of participation in the life of the outside world.

She had not long to wait for an introduction to the world of Gray Beach. That afternoon there was ushered into her room—according to orders—a small stranger in a pink sunbonnet and a pink gingham apron. "For Miss Milly," announced the maid, and closed the door, leaving just within it the tiny caller. She hung her head, grasping one of her long beautiful braids in one hand while the other drooped at her side with a heavy branch of some fragrant shrub.

"Did you bring those sweet flowers to me?"—and Milly held out one hand the very little way she could lift it. "How very kind you are to me! I am sure you have brought me flowers before, haven't you?"

The pink sunbonnet nodded vigorously and then sank lower on the pink gingham breast.

"I thought so! I have asked a great many questions about the Gray Beach little folks, and I have heard a great many things. Won't you come over near my

chair? I should like to know you wherever we may meet, and some time you might leave your pretty pink bonnet at home. That is all I can see now."

The bonnet moved in the direction of the recumbent figure and stopped. Then, it was slowly lifted, and from under its frilled edge peeped forth a very pretty face, round, dimpled, bright-eyed, and smiling roguishly. Evidently, there was only the first awkwardness of an introduction to overcome. But it was not yet conquered.

"Please give me my flowers, won't you?" coaxed Milly. "I want to hold them in my own hand, they are so sweet. I don't know even their names. I never lived where I could run about and pick flowers."

The bright eyes dimmed with a sudden pity, and the blossoms were hurried into the white, frail fingers with a cordial alacrity that banished shyness. "These ain't so very pretty. I can get you lots prettier than these."

"Do you know the name of every one of them, too?"

"Yes, indeedy! And so does Em'ly and Annie and all of them. That new girl from over at the Point knows more than any of us, though. But she isn't so very nice. Grandmother don't like her because she's colored."

The expression of cautious reserve as she spoke of this latest comer sat comically upon her pink and white countenance. The ice was broken now, and it was not allowed to freeze over again. Milly learned that her visitor's name was Leila, that she lived with her grandmother—"and grandfather" was an afterthought—that she had no brothers nor sisters, that she went to school "most days," that there would soon be strawberries up in the woods, and that Em'ly and Annie and Ruthy and Mander

and the new girl from the Point, and "all the Netterleys, the whole six of them" wanted to see her "as bad as anything." By that time, Helena felt the interview was growing too lengthy, and she came in to note its effect. With quick instinct the little maid took up her bonnet, —she had taken it off that Milly might admire her braids and see how much they had grown since she had the "chills-anfever" (all in one word)—and putting it on, put on her wise old woman's air with it.

"I guess I better go now," she said sedately. "Grandmother says I must never stay as long as I want in anybody's house but hers, or I might stay too long. And grandfather—he's awful funny--said I mustn't make my friends twice glad. So I'll go."

"But—how could you make them twice glad?" asked Helena.

The bright eyes looked at her sharply.

"You were glad to see me come, wasn't you?"—turning to Milly.

"Indeed, I was very glad!"

"Well, that was once. If I stay till you get tired of me, you'll be glad to see me go, won't you? That would be twice glad. But you ain't tired, are you?"

It was such an anxious little face under the pink sunbonnet now that Milly had to speak very eagerly and earnestly when she declared that she was not at all tired, and there was not the least danger of making her twice glad. She must come soon again.

"And you must come and see us, soon as you're better. It'll do you good. Grandmother'll like it if you'll come too, most any time," she added politely to Helena. "Only

I can't tell her a single one of your names because I don't know them."

The first part of this speech was in her oldest manner—her grandmother's, no doubt—but the last was a cute little expression of natural curiosity, very innocently clever. It was very pleasantly gratified.

"Oh, that is too bad!" said Helena. "We might have forgotten that if you had not mentioned it. This is Milly, the one you came to see, and to whom you children and every one is so good and kind. She is Milly Aveling."

"And this is Helena Marsden," introduced Milly. "The tall girl with the long hair is her sister, Frank Marsden. Can you remember them now? You won't forget them when you tell your grandmother?"

"No, thank you. I hardly ever forget. Grandmother says I have a first-rate—remember,"—after a pause. "I guess I'll go now; and I'll tell her as soon as I get home. Good-by! But—that other girl. Is she a boy? You said Frank, you know."

"Oh, yes! Her name is really Frances, but when we were little girls we wanted a brother very much, and I called her Frank to make believe I had one."

"It's a very pretty name, but it sounds queer for a girl. We don't ever call it that way down at Gray Beach. There's only Frank Preston, and he's a man. He votes next election, grandfather says."

Thus she departed, holding the pink sunbonnet very high in the air and giving an extra flirt to the short skirts under the pink gingham apron. Helena escorted her to the door and watched her through the gate and to the next house, on the corner.

"They were all lying in wait for her, Milly," she reported on her return. "They came trooping out from among the bushes of Pine Grove and tumbling over the shells in the borders of Holly Villa. I wish I could hear her report of us unseen! Isn't she a study!"

"She's the prettiest of them, and there are several beauties," said Frank. "I think the faces all have more individuality than those of city children. Here they are not all made on the same block and brought up on the same angles, the same light and shade, the same brick-and-mortar coloring. But the Netterleys! Wait until they appear on the scene, Milly. I have heard of nothing to equal them since I came. 'Them young uns,' Albert calls them all, but he has a peculiar sniff of scorn for the six Netterleys."

"The Netterleys are coming to see me," said Milly nervously. "I asked her to bring them all."

"They are? Well!"

"To bring all the children, I mean, and she had spoken of them, and said they wanted to come too. I—I don't think they can get into mischief here."

In her helpless condition she was getting into what Frank called "a state." Her flushed face and wide-open eyes warned them that the subject must be changed and her thoughts diverted—that even an innocent pink sunbonnet might cover vivacious gossip enough to exhaust the vitality of one whose hold on life was so frail.

"Mischief here?" said Frank coolly. "I think I see them at it! Besides, they may only be very bright, clever children. We don't abide by Albert's decisions in other things. But I saw Father Morgan while I was out. He

introduced himself and sent a message to mother. Where is she?"

"Gone to Miss Hilson's with that box of candy before it gets stale. Miss Hilson sent her such a nice note, Milly. She has been kept in the house for two or three days with a bad cold, or she would have called before. Mother thought she would answer it in person and take the candy."

"I thought no one took cold here," remarked Milly, passing the Netterleys.

"They don't," promptly decided Frank. "Miss Hilson was not here when she caught it—she was several miles away. She was at Great Bay Head for a night and a day."

"Why, Frank!" exclaimed Helena.

"She was. I heard it at the post-office, the store and the carpenter's shop. She went over before you came, and in my loneliness, whatever I heard sank into my silent soul and remained there. Besides, I asked who Miss Hilson was, just to make talk—I was tired of silence—and that impressed it all on my mind. She went over to see them draw something or catch something in a net, and she was caught in the rain and then caught cold. She had to stay there until her clothes were dried to come home in."

"You take easily to village gossip," said Mrs. Marsden from the hall door, where she had paused behind the portières while making sure that there was no stranger within.

"O mother! Have you had a dish yourself?"

"Indeed, I have not. I have made a very pleasant ac-

quaintance. We know a great many of the same people, and Miss Hilson is very intelligent and has seen a great deal. I like what she says of Gray Beach. She has lived here all the year round for seven years, so she has given it a fair trial. And she told me all about the church. We can do something for it, and I have missed the Sanctuary Society even already."

Then Frank gave Father Morgan's message, and they talked and planned until Mr. Aveling came in from the train, tired, but satisfied with the day's progress. He was almost ready to sail, he said. Milly had too much to think of to regret the door she had opened to the active world in the persons of the Netterleys.

Yet she did think of that world. When Helena was leaving her for that cozy chat she had each night with her father, the light clasp of Milly's feeble fingers detained her.

"Helena," she said, shyly, "I wish I had something to do,—something real. Am I too sick to have the children with me often? I might learn something, and so might they. I might do some good, you know."

Helena smiled down into the earnest face.

"The missionary spirit at work? Well, you might think it over until you are able for it. I don't think it will be long and there are—the Netterleys. If any one can manage them you can, for you can always get on with boys."

"Are they all boys?"

"All six of them. Get Albert to tell you about them. With all due allowance, you will have something left to build your castles."

Milly laughed.

"I was afraid even you might think I would never be good for anything again," she said with a long sigh, as her father came in and Helena passed out.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORMY PETREL'S NEST.

THAT was the name Miss Hilson gave to her cottage. She had come to Gray Beach seven years before, for a quiet rest after a great sorrow and many sad changes in her life, and she had liked the place so much that she bought the cottage which suited her best of all and made a new home for herself far from all that had made home before. With her work and her books and her flowers, she was never idle, never complaining, never restless. The old servant she had brought with her attended to all the household affairs, and she wrote or studied or wandered abroad in pleasant weather, thinking and planning new stories—for she was a writer of stories.

The cottage was not on the beach, and not very near the others. It stood rather on the outskirts of the pine woods, and its little garden ran down to the edge of the largest, clearest, and deepest of the fresh water ponds or small lakes. Originally, the plain and simple seaside house, rough and ugly, but a shelter from the midday sun and the chill of night, she had gradually altered its whole appearance to that of a half foreign, wholly tasteful, home. It was gray, of course, for any one who knew the beauty of the peculiar coloring of one of the gray days that gave the beach its name would not have thought of disturbing its charm with any clash of hue or tint. But it was a very

delicate gray, and it was daintily touched and enlivened with soft blue in narrow lines and light touches. There was a veranda rail to the roof of the lower porch, and a blue and gray striped awning for the summer days, which gave a double space for use out of doors. The pines came out as sentinels on either side, and stood here and there along the garden fence, grave, beautiful, and stately, while the water of the little lake sparkled and rippled, summer and winter, for she had never seen a mask of ice upon its smiling face.

Miss Hilson herself was not old—that is, she did not feel in the least old, and she had forgotten to repine at the change in her fortunes or to think longingly of her beloved, who had gone from her as God willed. The years had used her kindly, and she was a very pleasant thing to look upon. She was what Albert had called her—"the little lady." She had soft brown hair and clear brown eyes, and a quiet, pleasant look that was as gladsome as a smile.

The children of Gray Beach liked her and often wished they could be with her, but she was too busy, and it was work that required her to be much alone. But she knew more of them than they did of her, for she studied them, and carried the thought of them with her.

To end all, she was the only Catholic living at Gray Beach for several years, "except," as she told Mrs. Marsden, "the scissors-grinder, and he won't go to church." At first she had gone across the meadows to the large city, which was alive, winter and summer, and had a church and a congregation quite like an inland city. But she had written and talked of the rest and beauty of Gray Beach not in

vain. From a summer chapel and a visiting priest, there had gradually grown St. Monica by the Sea, and a priest's house that afforded needed rest to many.

"And now we have come to join you," Mrs. Marsden said. "We shall be here for more than the summer and, perhaps, more than the winter."

"You have brought an invalid, I know. I hope and think it is to the right place, for here we are never ill as in other places. Can you note any improvement, or is it too soon?"

"Too soon to be very sure of lasting benefit, but she is very much better than when we came."

Then Mrs. Marsden told the story, and Miss Hilson listened with tender interest and an understanding of the whole that prepared her to be Milly's friend. She was running over the names of her favorite books, and catching a glimpse of pleasant things in the future even while she listened. Miss Hilson knew books so well that she believed in their help and comfort more than most people.

"Will you come and see Milly?" said Mrs. Marsden as she rose to leave. "Your cousin told me of your busy hours, and of your inability to make time for all the things with which other people try to fill up the days, but I should be very glad if you could make an idle half-hour for her. If you will allow it my girls shall come to you now and then, so that they may not slip into altogether bad habits of selfishness and discourtesy, but Milly—she cannot come."

"She is one of the royal family of sufferers," said Miss Hilson. "Shall I not gladly pay my court to her? Tell her from me that I shall be only too happy to do the

honors of Gray Beach to her as soon as possible. She must get into the pine woods and out upon the sands. She has never known what sunrise and sunset mean yet. There are three hundred and sixty-five of each in each year—to say nothing of the odd ones—and there has never been one which repeats any other one. Father Morgan will tell you that he has seen the sun set in every sea of every clime, but never saw it in its perfection until he watched it here. Oh! there is more in this quiet corner of the globe than any one who does not know it could imagine."

All of this Mrs. Marsden repeated as she chatted with the three girls of their neighbor—their only neighbor, in truth, for all the other cottages were yet vacant, and the village was farther off in spirit than it was in fact. They were prepared to welcome her warmly, therefore, when she came to them in a few days, quite recovered from her cold and blithe and active as a bird. "She looks indeed like something out of a nest—a beautiful little something, but I don't know what. She is not chipper enough for a wren, nor saucy enough for a robin, nor demure enough for a black-cap, nor artificial enough for a canary. Come here, Helena, and look at her while you have a chance."

"She is like a dove," said Helena. "Not a bit like a stormy petrel. Who could connect the bleakness of a stormy sea with a thought of her! But she is coming here!"

"Good! I hoped she was. Milly, you will see her, won't you? She can tell you all about the Netterleys."

For the idea of the Netterleys had taken possession of Milly's mind as nothing had ever possessed it in her former state of health. She had Albert in for a morning

interview, and had indeed built castles of all kinds upon his ridiculously shrewd remarks and comically vivid descriptions. In the intervals of his household duties, Albert was making acquaintance with the sea and its inhabitants; the land and the dwellers therein. What he saw and what he heard, as well as "what de people down dar did not know," he observed, "would putty nigh on to fill the biggest kind of a book."

"But I hain't a-puttin' dem Netterleys into dat book. You min' dat now. Dey don't belong to the Don' knows. Dem six boys dess naterally take to badness, and de way dey knows hit dess fills dem up to de brim. I 'clar' to man, I wish my ole Mis' had dem six—yes, suh! de whole of dem six Netterleys. De way she would dress dem down, if dey *is* white!"

"Did she bring you up by dressing you down, Albert?" Albert sniggered.

"How you tink I larn anyting outen dat, Miss Frank? De lan' knows, I hain't good fer much, but if she do it dat a way I fin' myself heap sight wuss. You min' dat now!"

"Well, it might do for the Netterleys, and it might not," concluded Frank, as he withdrew. "Among other things I have heard on the wing, are terrific accounts of 'whalins' they have had countless times. They do not appear to have taken effect as was expected."

Certainly, the Netterleys "lay heavy" on Milly's mind after that talk with old Albert. She was eager to see Miss Hilson and to hear her account. So Miss Hilson was shown in, making Milly's second caller, for the children had not as yet availed themselves of her invitation,

although the flowers increased in numbers as the spring widened and brightened the floral calendar with its increasing age.

Her first look into Miss Hilson's face inspired her with confidence and trust. And Miss Hilson's account was most interesting.

The Netterleys, she said, had a history. They were six boys ranging from sixteen to nine, motherless for years and now fatherless. They had come to Gray Beach—or rather, to a house some five miles from Gray Beach, on the Great Bay side—when the younger boys were mere babies; indeed, she thought the youngest was born after they came. At any rate, the mother did not live very long. They had been very rich, and the house they came to had been one of two or three summer places, and one which they seldom saw—a sort of fishing and gunning place to which the father came with his friends. But they had suddenly lost everything else, and came to it for shelter. The country people said the mother was still very beautiful and very gentle and sweet-mannered, but her heart was broken, and she faded away like a snowdrift under the first hot sun. The houseful of children was left with no other care than the father's, for it was really a loss of everything with them, and servants, horses, carriages, comfort of all kind was gone. The father was an odd creature, too proud and too lazy (and too meanly proud, at that) to do anything he should have done. The little children —baby and all—were nursed and cared for by the older boys, as boys of six and seven can care for babies of five and four and three and two, for there was little more than a year between them in regular order as they came. At

first, they lived in a curious fashion at Bay Bluff,—so the place was called—but at last even that slipped away from them, and the father, sunk lower and lower in his meanness and dead now to all pride, had shuffled over to the pine woods near the Point, into a hut little better than a cattle-shed. The scissors-grinder's home was palace-like beside it. There they were now, as they had been ever since she came to Gray Beach. "They are little better than outlaws," concluded Miss Hilson, "and, yet, they interest me greatly. They are handsome fellows, and they are bright. And the other children like them, which is not a bad sign. But what will become of them? Now and then they go to the village school—as they have a perfect right to do—but they always end their lessons with a quarrel of some kind, and when the teacher cannot bear it any longer, they are sent home in disgrace and with stern threats that act for a little time as a wholesome sedative. But they forget the past, think others have forgotten it, and break out anew. To tell the truth, the people about here are very patient with them—they are a good, kind people, on the whole—and when their father was drowned last year—for he was drowned, no one knows how, and his body never found—there was a great deal of right feeling shown, and helping hands extended from all sides. The eldest, Tom, I have quite a fancy for, although he has never allowed me to know him except in the most distant manner possible. Poor fellow! He has had a terribly hard and hopeless life."

Milly had not spoken, but she had heard with glistening eyes. Albert's story was confirmed, and yet excused.

What a story it was in reality ! She had read such things, but that they could be true now ! It had never seemed possible.

Miss Hilson had been well pleased with the reception of her account. Milly's face had spoken, though her lips were closed. Helena was thoughtful and Frank curious, yet subdued. She had read the three with the eyes of a student and a dreamer, with comparison and instinct both at work.

"The three are very unlike, yet with much in common. But the Marsdens will never wear out the sheath by the mere carrying of the blade through the struggle. Milly Aveling has already done that. Poor child ! She needs help in more ways than one."

And Miss Hilson turned back on her steps, and went through the woods to the church, as is the first impulse of the Catholic heart. Happy are they to whom the door is ever open and the lamp ever burning. There is no sorrow, no care, no perplexity that cannot be laid to rest before the Tabernacle where the lamp burns.

CHAPTER VII.

"ALL OUT DOORS."

MISS HILSON did not allow her feeling for Milly to lose zest. She went daily to the church for "a quiet time," and very often—almost daily, in fact—went home by Ocean Cottage "for a word or two." She was a welcome presence, and the break in the day, always half expected, half a pleasant surprise, was a particularly good thing for the girl. She was gaining rapidly, and before June, could sit upright in her wheeled chair and use her hands slowly but quite skilfully. Each day developed some new energy and some phase of determined effort. But no life returned to her feet and ankles. She was chained to her chair, she said, like the king of the Black Isles, who was marble from his waist down.

She had grown years older mentally even in the two months that had passed so quickly, yet seemed to hold more than all the years of her life that went before them. The first of June her father sailed from New York, very hopeful, but sadly grieved to part from her. His health, however, far more than his business, demanded the change which seemed to await him in the mountain country of Brazil beyond Rio Janeiro, and which Mr. Marsden wrote of as the Paradise of invalids. Milly said nothing, but she missed in a double sense the one who had been father and mother, and, indeed, of late a child of her care and

thoughts. But everything helped with her in some way, although she did not know it at the time. Her loneliness and craving made it easier for her to brave the outside world. The cottagers had taken possession of their summer homes, and the beach and board-walk were no longer an undisturbed waste for hours at a time when she could have been as much at her ease on them as in her own room, but she was now often seen upon the sands, Albert rolling her chair and Helena or Frank walking beside her. Sometimes Mrs. Marsden joined them in a shady corner near the rustic pavilion, and they had a "generally jolly time," reading, talking, and watching the newcomers. There was a particularly stout and hospitable-looking basket known in the house as the "beach basket," which appeared upon such occasions, and seemed to hold anything that was asked for in the way of news, luncheon, knitting, embroideries, pencil and paper, novels and poetry.

"We keep it always packed," explained Frank to Miss Hilson, "and one packing will do for three years or so. Nobody ever wants to read, or knit, or sew, or do her duty by the poets on the sands, but it looks well to be provided."

"And what do you find in the luncheon line that will furnish forth the refreshments for three years or so?"

"Albert sees to that. He spends an hour of vocal misery over that basket whenever mother orders its appearance. He grumbles if we do eat and he grumbles if we don't. All the time, however, he is preparing and tucking away in odd corners, where we can get them without absolutely unpacking, all sorts of 'mouthfuls,' as he

says. By the way, let me get you some of them. Albert's 'ole Mis' prepared him for a Pullman car porter, among her other good works."

"There is Tom Netterley," said Miss Hilson in a low voice to Milly, as Frank was setting out a very pretty lunch on a worn and sun-dried timber of the old wreck, "and I should not wonder if this is the first sight he has had of a 'mouthful' to-day. I heard yesterday that they were in one of their periodical cramps as to means and morsels."

He was looking down upon the party from the board-walk which edged the bluff. A handsome, picturesque fellow, looking far more than his sixteen years, tall, slight, dark, and not at all evil-looking, in spite of his record.

"Do you think he is really hungry?" questioned Milly.

"My dear, he has been hungry nine-tenths of his days, for when they have food, they do not know how to make the best of it, or to save the waste for less plenteous seasons. I have heard that their kitchen furniture and utensils are all combined in one immense black pot, into which they toss anything they consider eatable as they get it, slowly stewing the contents whenever one or the other chooses to build the fire beneath it and watch it simmer. It is never empty unless they fail to find forage. And they do fail."

The dark eyes of the boy were fixed upon her with a piercing intensity as she spoke, as though he heard even at that distance, and with an expression of protest or entreaty or—it might be—hungry longing that appealed to Milly.

"Oh! do you think he can want it? I never, never came so near to any one I knew had not enough to eat."

"Fortunate girl! But city poverty is lost in the crowd, I remember. Out here, the brotherhood of man, like everything else in nature, comes out clearly under the light of such a heaven of unsullied purity, and one half the world knows how the other half suffers, at least. I have learned many things since I drifted into this haven. So will you."

"I'm sure I hope so. Indeed, I have already learned some things. But that boy's face. It is so sad and so old for sixteen—isn't that what they say he is?"

"About that. Have you seen the others—the little ones who run and play with Leila and Em'ly and Annie, your three friends?"

"Not yet. Leila says they are coming the next time she comes, if 'the new girl from the Point' don't come. They seem to have a code of manners of their own, and count off so many for each visit."

"I imagine Leila's wise grandmother sees to *that*, that you may not be overwhelmed. But it is the first time I have heard of 'the new girl from the Point.'"

"She is colored."

"Oh! I have seen her, then. I understand the Netterleys hold themselves very much aloof from the colored population. What a comment on distinction of race! There is not a father in the pine woods settlement who is not a better father than Mr. Netterley has been, not a mother who has not been kind and generous out of her home stores to his neglected boys. There are good and brave and unselfish souls over at the Point, where there

are many of the freedmen's descendants. Their parents and grandparents came here after the Civil War, and found the genial climate better suited to their southern constitutions."

"This little girl comes over to school, I think, and she must be a very nice child. But the Netterleys gave her the choice of coming. Leila said they told her she might come first if she wanted to, only they wouldn't come when she did. I didn't know the reason for the arrangement nor the objection."

"Well, it is Netterley-like to show some curious and distorted feature of courtesy in their rudest dealings with their fellows. It is as if they were haunted and driven by the ghosts of their ancestors' culture and breeding."

"Miss Hilson," said Frank, who had sent Albert for ginger ale from the ice-box of the cottage, and waited his return, "Albert says that is young Netterley. If this was a Roseburn picnic long ago, I should send to ask him to have lunch. Would it do down here?"

"If you will go yourself and ask him. Your mother may not be willing."

"Would *you* do it yourself?"

"Yes—as an experiment."

Without another word, Frank walked lightly to the place on the sands under the figure on the board walk, and invited him to have some luncheon with them. And, to the surprise of all, without a moment's hesitancy, he accepted, vaulted over the rail and came with her to Milly's side.

He was too quietly natural to be awkward. He spoke to Miss Hilson with reserve, and to the others as to those

more of his own age, and with less formality. But he said very little. A few remarks on the old wreck they were using as table and chairs in one, showed that he knew a great deal of the sea and the shore as he had actually seen and tested them, and called attention to matters the girls had not noticed.

"This was a very old ship," he said. "You can tell that from the way it is put together with wooden pegs. These little round things all over it are the smooth ends of the pegs. They used to build ships that way in Sweden and Norway, a sailor told me."

"Wooden pegs!" exclaimed Frank. "Why, there are thousands of them in this one piece of the wreck. How long has it been here? But, of course, it was long before you can remember."

"It hasn't been *here* so very long. It moves up and down the coast. When you have been here a little while—like next winter—you'll see it go away and come back, maybe two or three times. It's been down at the lower pavilion twice."

"Why don't they use it for firewood?" asked Mrs. Marsden, who had joined them. "There must be several cords in this piece."

He looked at her earnestly, as if puzzled.

"This piece is pretty near the whole of a good big ship. It's down deep in the sand now. The sand soon blows over anything and buries it. Look at her dress," pointing to Milly's motionless skirt, on which the sand already lay in smooth, even films, following each curve and fold. "That's the way it'll do with anything that don't move."

A sudden flush sprang to his very eyes over the bronzed cheeks, and he rose instantly.

"I must be going over to town!" he said, hurriedly. "I'm much obliged to you for this." Then, with a hesitancy almost shy, "You're the folks from Ocean Cottage, ain't you? I've heard of—her."

"Miss Aveling, you mean?"

He looked directly at her, and addressed her.

"I'm glad to see you down here. It's the best place in the world for anybody who ain't strong. You must keep in the open air, and there's plenty of it. Your man can push you up to the lake and through the woods, and round our way. There's a lot of pretty places round here. We used to live at a pretty place over yonder,"—with a backward jerk of his head—"but you'd have to get a wagon and drive over. And it's nice enough here. Good-by!"

He was off up the beach without a look behind him. They watched him in silence until he was surely out of hearing.

"Milly, he made you an apology in that last speech which was all your own. Did you see him color the instant he referred to the sand covering things where there is no motion?"

"Was that it? Why, I never noticed it. I was too much interested in what he was saying. This bit of old wreck is deceiving."

"It is indeed," said Miss Hilson. "I presume Tom Netterley knows from experience all there is to know about cutting it up for firewood. It is hard as iron. All these wooden pegs driven through and through it have toughened

in it, and make cross obstructions no steel can sever. It has been beating to and fro here for a quarter of a century at least, when, they *do* say, a Norwegian bark was wrecked in a great storm. But *this* may not be *that*. It may be a century older, and come in from the Sargasso Sea."

"So even Tom Netterley could teach us something," commented Helena. "Do you know, these children and young people down here seem to me to know a great deal that is worth knowing? Roseburn is called country, but it is too near the city to be real country. It is spoiled for use or beauty either, according to nature. But here—there is a dignity in living, and the children arrive early at its honors."

"Dat dar Netterley—hum! He mighty fine gen'leman alongside our folks. But dey don' see t'other side of him—not dess yit. You min' dat now!"

"Now, listen to Albert! He's talking to himself, Miss Hilson, and he has no idea we can hear it. You should be with us sometimes, and get an unvarnished opinion of us as he views us. I tell you, we 'see ourselves as others see us,' then."

Milly lay looking out to sea. "A dignity in living." Yes, there was. She felt it with every breath she drew, with every look she sent heavenward across that wide expanse. East, west, north, south, and straight upward—it was heaven everywhere, and a thought of God borne inward on every ray of light. Yet here were the Netterleys, as there were so many in the narrow city streets. As she turned restlessly towards the others to lose herself in their talk, she saw the cross upon the spire. Something without herself flashed home like the spoken word: "And

that is here, too!" All it stood for rushed upon her. Self-denial, patience, love, hope, courageous uplifting of the cross against all evil everywhere—the confusion and emotion of her thoughts at the time only deepened the impression. Afterwards, she thought it all out and studied over it with diligence and in humility.

"And here," said Helena to Miss Hilson, lovingly laying her hand on Milly's soft curls, all unconscious of the meaning in her words, "she has all out doors to grow in, hasn't she?"

"All out doors!" said Miss Hilson, with her bright smile. And some thought of what was in Milly's mind passed like a prayer through hers.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LODGE IN THE WILDERNESS.

THE summer guests and cottagers soon became accustomed to the wheeled chair and its retinue. Milly lived in the open air and the children gathered in her wake as naturally as birds follow a vessel. Guides, philosophers and friends they certainly were, for the various expeditions within reach of Albert's powers and the limits of the wheeled chair were undertaken by their advice and carried through with their encouragement and sagacious counsel.

Farther and farther each day the rambles extended, and the color bloomed in Milly's face, the light beamed in her eyes as never before, while the use she was compelled to make of her hands and arms so strengthened both as to give her wonderful command of her helpless body, after all. She grew quite plump, too, and acquired all sorts of accomplishments under the children's tuition, for they were all expert in country sports and home manufactures that forwarded the pursuit of these. She could tell a good kite from a bad one, and help to make one ; she was authority on bows and arrows, and, above all, on fishing tackle, and was looked upon as a perfect mine of wealth by the happy, little care-free souls who had no money, and indeed seldom saw any in the hands of the home people.

Provided with poles and sticks of all sorts and sizes the party would gather at the lake, and the most satisfactory shoppers, Leila Herbert and Annie Merton, be despatched to Mr. Folsom's to buy hooks and lines. The Netterleys would appear with the bait, and there would be anxious, eager waiting until a shout announced the return of the shoppers. Then such crowding and pushing and protesting and entreating!—all with perfect good nature, however, for it was understood that "cross people" worried "poor sick Miss Milly" and could not be tolerated where she was, particularly if Albert was on guard. "Miss Milly" portioned out the hooks and lines, and Albert patiently poled them according to the somewhat eccentric directions of some of the members. In the end, every one had a line, including Milly herself, and the fishing began. It was wonderful how many small creatures they landed, notwithstanding a continual chorus of merry nonsense and endless hushings and "Keep quiet, will you?" from every fisher in turn. Corks bobbed frantically, poles waved triumphantly, lines described all sorts of curves in the air and sank in maddening tangles on the grass. Occasionally, hooks caught in the garments of little fishers as well as in the gills of little fishes, and even Albert had to go home with a hook in his "yaller brown trousers," while the youngest Donny—aged four—roared in anguish over his severed line, now dangling harmlessly from his foot or two of switch. But no real harm ever came to them. They were full of expedients, and met any accident with good nature and kindly patience and assistance. So far as Milly could discover, the four Netterleys—and they were now constant in their attendance on her—were

not better nor worse than the others, and two of them were unusually bright. The little colored girl was not often with them in their outings. Before school closed, she used to trudge away from them with backward turning head and longing eyes, going home faithfully and punctually to "help Mommy take keer of the child'ens." Afterwards, she came two or three times, to look on, shy and smiling, from the bushes, until she was hailed with joyous shouts and dragged into the circle for full participation in all the fun. The Netterleys were only tolerant, but they *were* tolerant.

"Why don't you like Alissa?" asked Milly one day when she had Louis Netterley alone beside her chair for a brief interval. "Didn't I hear you say just now you wouldn't fish on the same side of the lake with her?"

"Dassent like her," was the prompt answer. "Got nothin' agin her, though."

"You dare not like her? Why, that is odd! I think she is a very good and pleasant little girl, and she is always ready to give up to you."

"Has ter. She knows she'd better when our Dan's round."

"Now, Louis, I won't have you say such a mean, cowardly thing as that to me. Of course, I can only feel sorry for you if you think it, for I cannot change your thoughts, but I can put a stop to your saying it where I can hear it. If Dan is rude or cruel to a good little girl—to any little girl or boy—he is a very mean fellow, and if you stand by and look on without taking that one's part, you are both mean and a coward. But I don't think you are either."

He hung his head.

"Our Tom says we ain't that kind of folks. He won't let us go with them P'inters."

"Does he let you frighten their little girls, though? I don't believe it of him. One thing is certain. All you children are my guests on these out-of-doors parties as much as if you came to see me inside the walls of Ocean Cottage. I am polite and attentive to you, and I try to make each one have a real good time——"

"You bet yer do!" he interrupted her to applaud.

"Well, then, I expect you all to be polite and attentive to me and to every one who is my guest. I expect it particularly of you boys, for men are always on their good behavior when they are guests and well entertained. I am always glad to see you and Dan and August and Carroll—you know that—but you must not be rude to any one you find here. If you are you cannot come."

Nothing more was ever said. But it was a seed well sown, and the four boys were all as pleasant as possible to Alissa when she joined them. To Albert, they never dared "show demselbs off," as he said. Albert was a privileged person in many ways.

So they went round the lake and through the woods and down the road to Great Bay and up the road to the salt marshes, gathering lovely and curious things, blossoms and weeds and leaves and mosses and knowledge. Never were brighter little eyes, quicker little fingers, more retentive little memories. Local names and local peculiarities were all at their tongues' ends, and when Milly supplemented what they told her with home readings, which she rehearsed to them, they listened, commented, and packed it

away to bring it forth at unexpected times and, very often, in unexpected forms.

Of course they met with various adventures. Once they found a snake from which they all fled in fear as "pisen," leaving Milly and Albert to face it and howling in distress at her danger. It was Dan Netterley who turned back, and with set teeth and face absolutely blanched with determination, marched up to the bush under which it had glided to shake it and "punch her out." And punched out she certainly was and killed—a spotted, speckled, brilliant-hued reptile really poisonous and seldom found in that vicinity. Many tales were told of its venom and malignity that justified the children's fright, their instant recognition and their prompt flight, calling, too, for due appreciation of Dan's courage on reflection.

Another time they encountered the only flock of sheep in the county, which sought pasture where they could and fed here and there on the banks of the lake or the edge of the wood. This time it was Milly who was afraid, to the endless merry scorn of the children. They went home with her in radiant glee.

"O, Mis' Marsden! don't you think she was afraid of the sheep, and with us all there, too, and Albert besides!"

This was Leila, who, as the nearest neighbor, was more often at the cottage and more familiar with Mrs. Marsden.

"And what you think she asked us?" piped up another little voice. "She said, did we think the Billy sheep was there,"—with a giggle that started a chorus of smothered shrieks of laughter, and brought Frank out to join in the merriment.

"Well, I have told you ever so often that I never lived

in the country. You ought not to expect me to know as much as you do."

"But we're a-teachin' you. And you've learned a lot a'ready," came in soothingly from a not very bright little chap with a fat, comfortable, rosy face.

"Indeed I have! I shall never call another sheep Billy. But you *do* call a goat Billy, don't you? We have goats in the city, and I have heard that."

"All the goats with horns is Billies."

"No, they ain't, neither! Louis Netterley had a goat with ears as long as his arm, and it wasn't Billy. It was Rocky, 'cause it come from the Rocky Mountains."

"Oh, you go home, Donny! You never saw that goat. You only heard Louis Netterley tell about 'them golden days.'"

With that, a dark countenance, silent and fierce, came to the fore. The speaker was off like a flash and the dark boy followed like another. The others scattered in consternation.

"Dat dar young un bettah kep' his mouf shet," pronounced Albert. "Dat Dan Netterley gwine gib him mos' powerful good dressin' down arter dat sass."

"I am not sure he doesn't deserve all he will get," said Mrs. Marsden. "The children were all happy together, and it was ill-natured mischief to stir up anger by derision of a companion. Even if it was nothing worse than mischief, it was ugly mischief."

"It wasn't 'smart,' either," said Frank, and ended it.

Not many days after that, the party plunged deeper than ever before into the woods, to visit a green bower of which the little girls told marvelous stories, and which

they called the "Fairies' Palace." They had trained the vines—or, rather, the older ones among them had assisted their elder sisters in training them—several years before, and they had fallen heirs in due succession to all the mysterious delights of such a woodland retreat. They had been urgent with Milly to visit it, and had at last appointed a day, and made an occasion of the visit.

The path was rough and intricate, but they pushed ahead with an advance guard, and marched "Indian fashion" in single file on each side the chair, holding down and forcing back the undergrowth so that Albert could get the stout chair near enough for him to carry Milly the remainder of the way. It was a delightful green nest. The children had prepared it in anticipation, and had decked it with mosses and shells, favorite bits of mica and treasures of china and pebbles until it was a veritable grotto, gleaming and sparkling in the dark verdure of vines and shrubs. The floor had been scraped and beaten down and covered to the depth of several inches with fine white sand, so that Milly's rug might be spread for her to rest in comfort and safety. Even Albert resigned himself to admiration with a bland smile of content.

"Bery putty—bery fine—'deed hit tiz! But dem young uns mus' 'a' wanted a heap of holp, dough. Dey got hit, too. Dey neber brung dat white san' all dis yer way dem lonesome selbs. You min' dat now!"

Gay was the laughter and merry the chatter for the next half-hour. Then Annie Merton grew restless, whispered to Leila Herbert, and with an important air they withdrew from the double circle around Milly's rug.

But the others understood, and meaning looks, mysterious smiles and whispers and nudgings went round. Milly's attention was discreetly fixed upon the revelations of some of the smallest of the party, who seized the opportunity to have their "say," while their elders were otherwise engaged.

Gradually, she became conscious of a certain uneasiness creeping over them. One by one they left, until she remained alone in the grotto, even Albert having vanished. She was just about to call him, for her helplessness, sometimes almost forgotten in her brave efforts to be as others were when with them, always rushed upon her consciousness with an overmastering fear if she found herself alone unexpectedly.

A wild shriek not far off, the rush and trample of feet, the breaking of twigs and branches all around her, as it seemed to her excited nerves, might have caused serious results to her if Albert had not stepped suddenly before her, calling to those without :

"Hesh, you chil'ens ! Hesh, I say ! You boun' ter scare Miss Milly outen her seben senses, wid yellin' an' screechin' an' sech foolishness. Hit hain't nothin', Miss Milly—deed hit hain't ! Not a blessed ting !"

"Well, I guess it is then !" indignantly exclaimed Annie Merton, but instantly changing her tone at sight of Milly's white face impressed with an undefinable fear. "Oh, it's not a snake, Miss Milly ! It's nothin' to hurt. It's only a man, and he ain't here, either."

"An' wot yer makin' all dis fuss 'bout a man fer ? Bress goodness ! Dar's mens nuff roun' dis yer place frum mornin' til night fer you to know dey's not wurf frightin'

my Miss Milly outen her senses dat away. Git along wif yer! You little black P'int gal, come roun' yer wif dat bottle. You *is* got gumption, min' dat now!"

It was not long before Milly could laugh at her cowardice, by way of soothing her contrite little friends. In their anxiety at her condition, they quite forgot their first excitement until she led back to it by her questions.

"Oh, we did mean to have everything real nice for you, Miss Milly!"

"Yes, we *did* have such a good treat!"

"And don't you think he's gone and eat every bit of it!"

"And all the peanuts. There ain't even one!"

A howl from the assembly greeted this item. Then followed an enumeration of the viands intended for the feast, with a running commentary of costs and contributors, through which babel Milly probed to the heart of the affair.

When the girls of the village fitted up their bower several years before, a spirit of emulation had induced the boys to fashion quite another style of retreat which they called a "Hunting Lodge in the Wilderness." It was not far from the "Fairies' Palace," but they managed cleverly to disguise it and all approach to it, and to keep their secret. Wonderful reports had gone forth about it, and all sorts of daring deeds were said to have been planned within it. Boys who absented themselves now and then without leave were supposed to find refuge in the Lodge, and to cook, eat, and sleep while there at their own sweet will. Stories of its comforts and furnishings were in the air. A stove, dishes, a bed, a pan in which "Miss

Thompson's best turkey" was roasted, and all, from stove to turkey, stolen. At least, these things had disappeared from their rightful owners, and been immediately charged to the long account of the Netterleys (as their contribution to the Lodge) by all their neighbors.

Neither Tom nor Fred had uttered one word when accused of the theft or the motive for it, and thus the village belief had been strengthened.

Early that spring, Annie Merton and a visitor had struck the trail in some of their wanderings and had followed it to the Lodge. With the shrewd daring which was Annie's characteristic, she had studied the situation and made the most of her opportunities. She "went round the house and round the house" and, at last, "peeped in at the window." There was the stove, and the bed, and the pan—no doubt of that! But the door was securely fastened with a lock so rusty that it was evident no one had been there for a long time, and there was a general disorder and dustiness that marked approaching decay. The boys had grown tired of their plaything.

Of course, Annie shared her discovery, but judiciously, and with one at a time. She told her cronies under solemn promise of secrecy, and led them at intervals to gaze from afar, thus proving her truthfulness. It was these visits to the Lodge which revived an interest in the Fairies' Palace and brought up the plan of "a treat" for Milly. It had been a most successful idea, and a great basket of "good things" made up for the treat. After consultation, Annie and Leila, always the leaders, had hidden it down by the spring, out of sight but safe. But—when they went for it at the appointed time, the basket had vanished. Foot-

steps not their own had left their impress on the mossy edge, and these footprints led up the trail to the Lodge. Fired with indignation, and breathing out vengeance on the poor Netterleys—at once suspected—the two little girls stormed and raged up to the very door of the Lodge. It was open. They paused on its threshold. There was the basket, there were the shells of the peanuts, the crumbs of the cake, and there on the rickety bed was a dirty, ragged, sleeping man, with a grizzled head and a great, dirty, tangled beard.

"Then it was not the Netterleys, after all," said Milly.

No, it was an old man, a dirty old man, that abomination of the children—a tramp.

"Grandmother won't ever touch that basket again," solemnly decided Leila, "for she just can't bear a tramp. She fairly 'spises them."

"And we haven't a bite to eat," concluded Annie. "Let's go home!"

"Dat's so! *Two* of you young uns is got some sense, an' one of *dem's* cullud. Dat's a putty fa'r averaige. Come, Miss Milly, hain't you nigh 'bout ready to go?"

That ended the treat at the Fairies' Palace, but it was long before Milly ceased to hear of it, to laugh at it, and to wonder at the number and the volume of the contents of that basket. In time, it might have seemed a mythical outgrowth of the widow's cruse and the jar of meal, for it certainly could not have given out. And the children could not have enjoyed its contents once in reality as they did fifty times in retrospect, while they abused, in fear and trembling, the "nasty, dirty, old tramp" who robbed them.

CHAPTER IX.

BUTTERFLIES.

THE little fright and the rough scramble through the woods, together with a little doubt in Mrs. Marsden's mind as to the safety of such expeditions where there was a probability of encountering a tramp, put a stop to Milly's outings for the time being. She was rather more helpless than she had been for some time during the week immediately following their adventure, and, besides, it was nearing the end of August and the weather at its greatest heat. Her chair and hammock were on the porch all day, moving with the sun, and keeping in the shade. From either she could watch the beach and the bathers, the open green and the tennis-players, the arriving and departing trolley cars with their changing and never-ending live freight. The children came decorously to call on her, singly, in pairs, or in demure little parties of three or four, dressed in their best, and with ribbons as long and as wide and as fresh as mother-pride and father-purse could provide. They were certainly quaint little subjects, amusing, instructive, and lovable. Their worldly-mindedness regarding the summer guests was remarkable, and their reserve, upon all subjects lying near their hearts when one of these intruded, was no less to be observed. Milly they looked upon as one of themselves, for she had

"come to stay." To her they expatiated eloquently on the delights of the beach, marking off each month with some new charm it would present, and developing such funds of information and such wealth of observation as amazed her. All that nature owned around them they loved and dwelt with. But, daily and hourly, the growing thoughtfulness of Milly recognized that their love and knowledge went no farther—they were never led in any way to "look through nature up to nature's God." They were left as to religious training to the freedom of the winds and the waves, the birds and the flowers. Yet the spire rose in their sight and the cross cast its shadow.

Milly was thinking a great deal, for, after all, there were many quiet hours. Her life was new to her in every way. She was for the first time one of a home household—its heart, in fact. The convent had been peace and order and holiness, "an ideal existence," as Frank had spoken of it. But it lacked the elements of that daily life that must ever be the lot of the majority. The little jars and frets, the clogging of the wheels of routine, and the nerve-taxing speed which at times must drive them, those she had never known. It was her happy lot to meet them first in a Catholic home, where intellect, culture, ambition, training, were all deep dyed with that reverence for the teaching of the Church which hallows the least thing and makes thought, word, and deed a link between the Creator and His creature. There was no "religion" talked, there was no effort made to edify, to reform, to show disapproval of the course of others—there was simply an earnest and humble desire to avoid sin and glorify God as He would have it. What the Church pronounced evil was avoided as evil, what the

Church ordered was done, for such must be as He willed it. And to one looking on, a loved and cherished one, there are a thousand and one small things that test and try the practise of the profession made by those amid whom she dwells.

Mrs. Marsden and the girls were all familiar with the needs of the little church by this time, and they and Miss Hilson hoped to do something to aid it materially during the coming year. There were more Catholics than ever before among the summer guests, and the priests in charge—for in summer the assistance of one or more was granted Father Morgan—found their rest need cause them no qualms as inglorious because inactive ease. Frank had long since come into a full understanding of the different accounts of "the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker," who in the timorous ignorance of the average non-Catholic had not dreamed of more than one priest "to a little bit of a church like that." One "minister" was enough for their own one sermon on Sunday and one "prayer-meeting" each week, and they had no conception of any other need of the soul to which a priest could minister. Each good man had seen a different man named to him as "the Catholic priest" by some previously enlightened neighbor, and had looked for no other. The priest, who was the parish priest of St. Monica by the Sea, was really the butcher's—that is, the postmaster's—priest, "an old gentleman, very quiet and religious." The others were new and strange as it suited. Delicate priests came for the air, overworked priests came for the quiet, anxious priests came to reflect and decide, far from interruptions, and between them, the little church sometimes fared wonderfully well

and always was blessed with enough wisdom to rely upon.

Besides the church, Helena and Frank had other interests more widespread. Friends and relatives came to Gray Beach because *they* were to be found there, and more of both were over at Brighton-on-the-Sea, where they could be reached by trolley several times in the day. There was bathing and tennis and moonlight on the beach and the porch as at all seaside resorts. There were clambakes, too, of an impromptu nature, where the Ocean Cottage party came out strong, providing clams, firewood, and beach at will. But Milly, in her deprivation, really lived the widest life, for she touched the original and utterly new life to her of the Gray Beach people in their lifelong homes.

In September, the summer guests began their flittings, Day by day their numbers dwindled. The hotel closed its doors, shut in its blinds, and slumbered like a dormouse. The cottages took down their awnings, put up their shutters, turned their keys, and smiled dreamily in their peaceful loneliness. Only here and there the boarding houses—there were as many of them nearly as there were houses in the village—struggled through the preparations for winter quarters with the incubus of a late guest, too sensible to leave the shore at its loveliest.

"The butterflies are nearly all gone," remarked Mrs. Marsden, as they sat on the porch one perfect afternoon in late September. "How glad I am that we may enjoy it in peace! I never saw the shore at perfection before."

"Nor I," said Milly. "But I never dreamed of per-

fection before this summer. I never had time, and I never knew how."

"Milly, you're not a bit of a butterfly," came from the hammock, where Frank had been suspiciously quiet for some time, after a parting at the trolley with the last of the cottage friends. "I believe I am, though. I begin to think longingly of Roseburn and city streets."

"With the Manning girls and the Trexall boys coming into view along our lane or on Chestnut street above Ninth."

There was a note of plaintive regret in Helena's voice.

"Too late now by several months," said Mrs. Marsden, calmly. "You were at Roseburn within reach of Chestnut street and the Mannings and the Trexalls and you elected to come to Gray Beach. You must abide by your election."

"And Milly is so much better, too. I think it is curing her, and that is something better than all the Mannings and Trexalls, after all. Yes, it is, Milly! You needn't shake your head and look wise. You take Helena's devotion for granted, but mine is worth just as much, if it is the silent kind."

"Oh, silent!" laughed their mother, "but there's a butterfly, and a magnificent one. Did you ever see such wings and such a perfect blue as they are?"

"The butterflies are going, then!" exclaimed Miss Hilson, who had been looking over some new books sent down to Milly. "It is nearly time for their flight. Have you ever seen one?"

"Never, unless you mean the one mother just referred to—the flight of the summer guests."

"I mean the real thing. It occurs here every year some time in September, and it is the most beautiful and wonderful of all the flights. I wonder yearly that no one has ever made it known."

"Oh, Miss Hilson, tell us about it! No one has ever mentioned it to us—and you wouldn't either if you were a real native. Not one of them would tell a summer guest of a good thing they could keep to themselves—I wouldn't miss it for the world."

"There is nothing to tell you, Frank, except to watch for it. First, there will be a flight of dragonflies, and soon after, the butterflies will come. One thing more, you will not have long to wait."

"That is a curious fact—the silence of the natives towards the summer people regarding anything that does not belong to the summer season. They seem to put it all down on a schedule and charge according to its place in the season or out of it."

"Well, mother, they have reason," said Frank. "I have had some experience of summer guests this year—only as a looker-on, thank Heaven!"

"Frank, don't say that again! I dislike such things in conversation and I will not have them from my own children at least."

"I wasn't the least bit wicked, mother! I meant it. I was thinking of the rudeness and inpudence, the coarseness and vulgarity these good, kind people have to put up with from these horrors out for the summer. You have always protected us carefully from boarders of all kinds and given very plain reasons for your objections to them. I never saw it until this summer, but I agree with Kate

Barton now. You know, she said, that no matter what people were or how they had been brought up *before* they went to board, they immediately became swine when they *did*, and the devil entered into them. I have seen lots of them this summer."

"And they did not all rush down the steep into the sea," said Helena, very seriously. "Yes, Frank, you are right. People you have a right to expect better things of seem to forget all decency, all consideration for others when they are away from their home for the summer. I wonder if they recover their right mind when they do get back. I shall watch."

"Helena!" said her mother, warningly. "Not exactly a kind way for either of you to speak, I think. But if you have learned so soon the unloveliness of such manners and customs, of course, you will never mortify us on your own account. You need only watch——"

"The flight of the butterflies!" cried Frank, springing up. "I thought I saw one or two! Now, look at them!"

Dragonflies! They were coming from all sides, but from where? They did not seem to rise from the ground nor to fall from the sky, but they were instantly there, sweeping towards the west with a light, noiseless flight, hurried and a little uncertain, but swift and westward, rising as they went. For a minute or two, the swarm thickened, and then as swiftly diminished. The last thin ranks were brightened and varied by the wavering flight of a few scattered butterflies.

"Yes, it has come!" said Miss Hilson. "I am so glad I happened to be with you or you might have missed it."

They watched it breathlessly. There never was anything more beautiful. Like the dragonflies, they did not come from the ground nor fall from the sky, but myriads and myriads of them were there and coming from everywhere. Softly, slowly, steadily they floated on, of all colors, of all sizes, of all kinds. The shrubs in the small yard were enfolded in their gorgeous beauty, and palpitated with golden and brown and purple and white and black and blue. One branch that Frank went close to, in order to examine it, was clothed to its very tip with small yellow creatures, whose tiny wings fluttered ceaselessly and in unison. She counted seventy-seven of them, but they were constantly floating away and floating to cling for a minute to the branch, so she could not be sure of the number. On and on and on they passed, the very heavens softly shaded by their clouds of color. It must have been nearly an hour before the last stragglers came up aimlessly from the meadows, and wandered pitifully here and there as though they had lost their way and missed their guides.

"Oh, I would not have missed it for all the Chestnut streets in the world!" said Milly, who had not spoken during the flight.

"Well, Milly, I'm very sure I would not," said Frank. "How was I to know there were such wonderful things out of season? Where are they going, Miss Hilson? Has no one ever followed them to find out? There is nothing out there but Great Bay, and they surely cannot cross it, wide as it is."

"That is one of the things never yet revealed even to me," answered Miss Hilson. "If any of the people know, they will not say so. I went with the flight one day as far

as I could, and they did flutter out across the waters towards the west, but afterwards I found them in the pine woods. But they were all gone from that day, as they will be from to-day. You will see them no more until next spring. Then, perhaps, some day in March or April—I saw it once in March—you will find them clinging to the golden-rod on the sand dunes, and spring will be here."

That night, when they were alone in their room—Milly had long since been moved into the second story, going up and down the stairs on a lift she had invented—Helena found her companion very thoughtful, almost melancholy.

"What is the matter, Sweetheart?" she asked caressingly. "Is it anything I may share? It is not time for another letter from your father, and he was so well in the last accounts."

"Helena, you are not sorry you came here to bring me, are you? I know you did come for that—principally for that, at least."

"Yes, we did come for that," replied Helena promptly. "But we thought we had reason on our side as well as sentiment. We all wanted stirring up and shaking out of selfish ways, for when you live always among your own people, and things go on just as 'our folks' think they should, you do get 'mighty briggity an' sot up,' to quote Albert. Frank and I talked it over together and with mother, and we all agreed. And, oh! what an experience of 'men and things' we have had already. Don't you worry, darling! Mother is quite, quite satisfied, and she knows."

"Well, I would not have missed to-day—nor any day since I came. But the butterflies! And the dragonflies' wings! Like little films and flashes of rainbows and crystals, wasn't it? And I used to be afraid of them!"

CHAPTER X.

MISS HILSON'S SILVER BOX.

MISS HILSON was right. The summer ended with the butterflies' flight, and the mornings and the evenings were the fall indeed. Lovely and peaceful, and as unlike the season's Gray Beach as possible, was it now. The villagers came out to new labors, and a different kind of activity was seen with each day. The fishing began, and then "everybody went a fishin'." The news would spread that they were "catching," and away would go every one, leaving house and cares behind them, to wander up and down the radiant sands, where it was softly cool and gloriously fresh, and not at all like the blazing summer noontides. Everybody talked to everybody else and the men, in rubber boots that would have swallowed an ordinary boy of ten, waded into the surf and drew out great rolls of net, spreading them on the beach with many a dexterous swing. Unrolled, they revealed all sorts of a catch. Now, it was only seaweed, now it was shells and seaweed, skates and horrors without a name, now a genuine catch of fine marketable fish. Always, there was jesting and merriment, good-natured and uncomplaining. Albert was well known by this time, and he contributed no little to the life of such occasions, taking all sorts of fun with a comical grimness and returning all jests at his expense with wit and shrewd sense that he only ventured

upon, with a sly glance and a curl of the lip which showed that he meant all he said and understood it, too.

The real gray days began, when everything, sea and sand and shore and sky, the very trees and houses, were of the same silvery hue, only darker and lighter, one against the other. Milly used to say they were the loveliest of all the days, and no color could compare with their soft mistiness. She was in the heart of them all, for her strength had returned, and Albert and she had so mastered the wheeled chair that it had to go where they chose to take it without a squeak.

She was waiting for him one morning, and Frank was scolding in her way about his loitering and chattering. Frank and he were the only members of the household who ever exchanged "hot shot," and she did pepper him sometimes, while he growled and grumbled in the most respectful manner possible to such utterances. "There he comes now. If that old sinner hasn't been to the other end of the place when he knew we were in a hurry! He is coming from Miss Hilson's."

"He's hurrying now, Frank," called Milly through the window after her, as she ran in for her mother to "come and settle him," "and I think he is worried about something, for he isn't getting up any kind of a smile. I do hope there is nothing the matter with Miss Hilson."

"Or Father Morgan or Father Drinker," suggested Helena. "I always think of them, for both seem so delicate."

"Albert, where *have* you been? You ought——goodness! what's the matter?"

"Miss Hilson, she been robbed!"

"Robbed?"

"Did they hurt her?"

"Robbed of what?"

Albert recovered his breath while the three sentences were uttered in as many different tones, and gave a brief and sensible account of it. He had heard it at the post-office, and, knowing well the limits of his liberty of action, hurried at once to headquarters for information. He found Miss Hilson quite prostrated. Her box of silver, although not large, was really filled with valuables, and it had been stolen. Stolen out of her own room during the night, the thief entering through the window and leaving it by the door, close beside her bed's head. The old servant on going down-stairs at day-dawn, had found the house open, so that considerable noise must have been made and great boldness and recklessness evinced by the burglar.

"She say, will some of our folks please come over dar. She mos' dun ober by dis yer. An' she want somebody wif some gumption to sen' one of dem tallygraf ter her folks in the city. I think she 'bout ready to git Miss Frank to sen' it 'cause she so spry."

"Yes, I think she will want me to do something of that kind. Mother, I'll run on now, and you come as soon as you can, won't you?"

A broad smile spread itself over the three faces as the girls looked at each other, for Albert's quiet little "dig" was most decorously given, and he went on into the house to lay down his packages with impenetrable dignity. Mrs. Marsden looked anxiously at Milly before she took

up her sunshade to follow Frank. Any sudden shock had hitherto affected her by rendering her helpless, but this time she seemed undisturbed. But she and Helena elected to stay quietly on the porch, awaiting the return of one or the other who hastened to Miss Hilson's aid. The party was broken up at any rate, for they were all going over to Great Bay through the woods.

Mrs. Marsden was the first to return. Miss Hilson was really in quite a bad way, for she had undoubtedly been chloroformed and heavily. As the sense of her loss became clearer and clearer to her, it grieved her more and more, and in her weakened condition she had not that control of herself that was best for her. She had sent Frank to Brighton-on-the-Sea, with a telegram, and to see the Mayor, without whose advice, they had long since learned, no one in the county thought fit to act. In the meantime, all the village had been there and was coming there, and appeared to intend circulating round there until the thief was caught.

"They have an idea he will soon be caught, but I think they will find it not so easy as they think."

"Do they think it was a tramp?" asked Helena.

"No, not a tramp."

Milly looked up at the sound of the voice.

"They suspect Tom Netterley!" she exclaimed with conviction.

"Yes, they do. Indeed, they are quite sure it was Tom, and have several very clever ways of doing it mapped out. I was surprised to see such intelligence of guilty schemes in this quiet people. They think he had an accomplice, of course. Frank can tell more when she comes. I

was anxious about you, Milly. I thought you might feel the shock of such a trifle even, when you had time to think of it."

"A trifle? Why, mother! Poor Miss Hilson does not think so."

"Miss Hilson would perfectly understand why I say a trifle in this connection. I mean, in Milly's case, it is a trifle compared with what it would have been had Albert rushed in bristling with news of any loss of life or terrible accident. This is a sore loss and grief to Miss Hilson, who held in great and loving veneration the things of her mother and father that were left to her. But had we heard of her death——".

"Thank you, Mrs. Marsden! I see it all now. But this did not do me any harm at all. I am very, very sorry, though!"

"Milly will begin worrying St. Anthony now," said Helena.

Milly colored to her curly locks.

"How do you know that?" she asked, amazed.

"Never mind her, Milly. If you have found that St. Anthony is a good friend, you are in the right, and have made a friend who will not fail you. Worry him, dear, as Helena expresses it, in Miss Hilson's behalf without scruple, for she is one of his friends beyond doubt. Here comes Frank!"

Frank had "lots of news." They were all sure it was Tom Netterley by this time, and the Mayor was surer than any one else. They had also ferreted out the story of the tramp the children found in the Lodge, and there were several who remembered seeing such a man with Tom

Netterley several times, in suspicious places and at odd hours. He had never appeared in the village, but it was evident now that he had been lurking about ever since the day of "the treat" and the Netterleys must have been in league with him and kept him supplied with food. The younger Netterleys were already under arrest and destined for "the tank," as they called the little ten-feet-square lock-up under the village supply of water for the primitive fire-engine. But Tom Netterley could not be found.

"I don't believe he did it!" burst forth Milly.

"Now, Milly, what's the use of saying that? You always have had the greatest fancy for those Netterleys, haven't you? I'm sure I wonder why."

Milly was silent. Her lips trembled and her eyes filled.

"She pities them so much," said Helena gently. "You never knew the unfortunate Milly did not pity, be he dog or man, kitten or naughty girl at school. And the Netterleys never have had a friend here, so far as I can hear."

Milly looked at her gratefully.

"And he looks so sad and so unhappy," she said. "Besides, I never have heard of anything but suspicions. Not one piece of mischief has ever been fastened on him. Fred has been caught, and Dan has owned up, but Tom has only been suspected, while his brothers always have denied his share in their badness."

"Dat's dess so, Miss Milly. Dey do say dat boy too turrible bad to be cotch. De—de bad man—'scuse me, ladies!—he holpin' him ebery time."

"Albert, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! Say-

ing such things right before mother, and not giving that poor boy even a good wish. You know I tell you always you are an old sinner, and you *are.*"

"Now, Miss Frank! I'se a heap better dan de mostest people. An' I hain't a-wishin' dat boy no wuss dan I wish all dem young uns—gibbin' such sass as dey does. Why, dey don' eben let dat ole Mis' Pushcart hab no ducks in peace."

"Miss Pushcart? Who in the world is she?"

"Dat dar ole ooman down on de White Beach curve. *She's* Mis' Pushcart—so I calls her,"—marching out with great dignity and a heaped-up tray of dinner dishes.

"He means Madame Pechereau!" exclaimed Frank. And Albert in his pantry chuckled at the bell-like laugh, sweet and clear, that rang out over his mistake.

"I 'clar' to man, dat gal laff ebery time she get de chance! Ole Albert kin dess 'bout do hit, too. He *make* heap mo' *chances* dan dey tink. He no fool, you min' dat. No mo' hain't dat Torm Netterley, an' dey hain't gwine ter cotch him dis side de ribber. Dat dey hain't!"

CHAPTER XI.

TOM AND HIS TROUBLES.

TOM NETTERLEY'S story was a sad one. He was old enough when there came a change in his father's fortunes to always retain a dim and exaggerated memory of golden days of plenty, when they lived in a splendid home of which his fair and gentle mother was the queen. He was boy enough to enjoy the first change to Bay Bluff, and not understanding it or his mother's failing health, to be only glad of anything which kept her always at home and ready to hear when he had wonderful things to tell. But the next change went to his heart's core. His mother died. Looking back at sixteen, he could not recall one thing after that like those he had been used to before she left them.

One after another, housekeeper succeeded housekeeper, each less like the women he had seen in his mother's time. The house grew poorer and more comfortless, the children wilder and more ragged, his father crosser, more careless, more stupid. Then came a day when there was no woman at all beneath the roof, and his father said he should get no one, that Tom and Fred must do what there was to do or go without it. The utter sense of helplessness, and disgrace and anger at his father which possessed him on that day when he first heard this decision, he never forgot. It was something awful and sorrowful to him always. But

he was glad to remember that he began at once to try to do what he had to do. And after that? Poor, poor boy!

The children grew up in spite of him unlike his mother's little boys. The home grew wretched and ragged and dirty as the boys, their father grew into a dirty tyrant, never sober and sometimes raging drunk. Bay Bluff, lonely and utterly forlorn as it was, passed out of his hands, and they were huddled into a miserable hut near the colored people's settlement at The Point. Tom's heart was broken then, and he half determined "to give up trying for anything," for he had tried all this time. Heavy as was his load, helpless as he was, he had thought each day that as soon as he could "get a start," he would take matters in his own hands and they should improve. He never got that start. His father disappeared, and still there was a mill-stone of fate around his son's neck, and the waves of a sea of troubles swept over him.

It was strange that he had never really known how bad a reputation he and his brothers bore. Busied night and day making the miserable living, and carrying everywhere with him the mental weight of anxiety and shame which no one ever suspected, much that went on around him passed unnoticed and without his understanding it. Fred was not thus ignorant, and with a feeling they all had for Tom of mingled pity, respect, and scorn for his "softness," he helped to keep him in ignorance, and to increase the neighbors' misjudgment. Fred was as truly "his father's son" as Tom was his mother's, and he cared nothing at all for the good or bad opinion of others. He enjoyed deceiving and tricking them. The other four were still small, Dan, the eldest of them, being only twelve.

The day Frank Marsden asked Tom Netterley to lunch with them, and he accepted, was a marked day to him. He had heard of some work over at Brighton-on-the-Sea which was within his ability, and on his way to ask for it he had been attracted by the sound of the gay, gentle voices to the group on the beach. Many times before he had seen the summer guests in the season, but from a distance, and without interest. Had it been the season, he would not have dreamed of passing on the board-walk. From the middle of June until the middle of September, the people of the place give way to the summer guests, and with a certain shy pride keep themselves and their own affairs in the background. But the Marsdens came early, and Tom had not heard of them ; therefore, he had started to town on the board-walk as the shortest way. Something in the party of ladies revived that dim, dear memory of his mother and her habits, and Milly in her wheeled chair, with her invalid's wraps and comforts, helped the memory. The longing to see and to hear and to be one of such a circle conquered his pride and his shyness for the time, and he forgot in their kind courtesy the difference between their life and his.

But he remembered it afterwards. Bitterly he recalled every sign and token of an existence to which he still insisted in his thoughts the Netterleys belonged, but from which their father had shut them out. Brooding and mourning in secret, Tom in that summer had gone on to new thoughts. He would "get that start" he would leave Gray Beach. He could do nothing more for the others there, and they were old enough to keep out of harm's way. Besides, if he were to go, Fred would see to

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the little fellows. He would go—as soon as the season ended.

The season was very near its close. It was the last week in September, and Tom was making his plans determinedly, but silently. It seemed best to him that he should slip out of Gray Beach and commence a new life untrammelled. He could "keep an eye" on them, but they need know nothing of the quarter from whence that eye looked forth. He made many preparations for their comfort, poor soul! poor indeed, but hard to procure and difficult to secure. At odd times and in a careless manner, he let fall words to Dan that he might recall and profit by, and to him, as to a confederate, he made known the hiding-places of some of the comforts. But he dropped no hint of departure, and he turned resolutely away from any good-by, even in thought, the night he left.

It was several nights before the robbery. A moonlight night, clear and brilliant, even in the pine woods through which he was making his way. He had a long walk before him to the nearest city, and he was shortening it while in the country with which he was familiar by cross-paths and "bee-lines" as he knew them. He was walking rapidly along a cleared track not far from the "Lodge in the Wilderness" and thinking of some of the things Fred had told him of the "fun" connected with it, when the sound of bushes carefully parted startled him. He stood still and looked about him. As he turned to go on, there stepped into his path from behind a great pine, a tall, thin, slouching man in a wide hat.

"I think you're a Netterley?" he said at once in a low, sharp voice.

"You can think what you please and I can't help it," answered Tom, who did not like his looks even in that light.

"Here, now, you needn't get lippy. I know you well enough. Your father told me what to look for, and I've had my eye on you this four weeks. You or the other fellow, I don't care which, I have been laying for in that old rat-hole of a hut."

"My father!" said Tom, as soon as he could speak after the shock. "My father was drowned a year ago."

"Not much he wasn't—worth two or three dead men yet—for drinking whisky and raising a row, that is. For he ain't worth much that is good, I'll own."

"Where is he?"

"That's my lookout. You see, I can be lippy, too. I know where he is, and I'm enough to know for the present. When you earn it, I'll pay by telling you what I know. I want some information out of you."

Tom stood like a post, as upright, as silent, and as immovable in his determination. This man should have nothing he could furnish at any price.

"I'm waiting for you," said the man.

"You'll get tired of that sooner than I shall."

"Don't you intend to ask me what I want?"

"No use in askin', for I don't intend to give you what you want."

"You're Tom," said the man. "Your father told me if I got hold of you, you'd cut up ugly. But you might as well be obliging in a way. I shall have to leave here on the morning train, and I can't wait for the other one. Tell me how many of the cottage folks are here now. I want to see one of them."

"Why don't you go and see him then? There's none of them in hidin'. Any man who wants to can walk straight up to them in day-time, or go to the house in the evening."

There was a quiet scorn in Tom's easy manner and simple words that enraged the man. With a curse, he struck at the young fellow, and Tom dodged the blow and, seeing the chance, darted past under the upraised arm, running swiftly on into the gloom.

He heard a crashing and stumbling behind him for a little time, but he knew the woods as well as the open, and turned and twisted through the familiar way-marks in a course that soon distanced the man. He slackened his pace then, but kept on as briskly as he could walk, thinking deeply all the time.

What did the man want? Was it true that his father was not drowned? If it was true, he must be in with this fellow and up to no good. What were they about to do at Gray Beach. "This four weeks," he said. Then he was the tramp who stole the children's basket. Louis said the children wouldn't play with him and August because they blamed that on the Netterleys. It had cut him so when the little fellow—his "baby"—cried over it, that he half determined to go back and clear the Netterleys by revealing the true thief. He was sure of him. Perhaps he ought to go back anyhow, and put the people on their guard. But, no! He was off now. He had thought of it long enough, and he had decided to let them take care of themselves at home. Why not let the others do the same? He would go on. And here was Bay Bluff.

He had come out on a broad open field, rising towards

the north, and on the west overhanging the waters of the Bay in a steep bluff. Not far from the edge of the bluff stood a large square house, flat-roofed and crowned with an ornamental observatory. There was an air of desolation about it, though, and the great porches had holes in the roof through which the moonlight streamed on the broken floors. The adjacent stables and carriage house and the more remote barn were all shattered ruins, mere skeletons of timber.

Tom was tired by his night run. He sat down on the grass in the shadow of the last pines, and looked long and sorrowfully at his lost home. He was going over in his mind the look it used to wear in each particular. There was the window of his mother's little dressing-room, where his small bed was placed once when he was sick for a day or two. How sweet she was, and how she petted him! That was before they ever came to live there, for he had a nurse and his mother wore such lovely dresses—not like those at the last, which were only wrappers. And there was the dining-room, and that was his father's room. For the first time in many years he recalled a gay young father, in fine linen and costly clothing, fresh, smiling, delicately scented from the bath. A keen pang sent tears into his eyes.

"If he is living! Oh, I cannot hope he is!" said the poor boy covering his face with his hands.

When he looked up again, some one was crossing the open space around the house. It was such bright moonlight that the very shadows could be traced from a distance, and Tom knew him for the man he had met in the woods.

"He has come by the beach!" he exclaimed. "He has been hiding there. Is father there?"

The keenest interest he had ever felt in Bay Bluff rushed upon him now. The man went up to the side door, and stopped. A soft whistle like the cry of a bird waking in the night was heard. In a minute or two he passed through the noiselessly opened door. Then Tom's keen eye caught the flash of a light, since he watched for it. The house was certainly occupied, and by those who wished to make it a hiding place. Was his father one of them?

It was not very long before he saw several shadows glide out from the shadow of the building into the moonlight and go over the bluff. They were talking in low voices, as though perfectly sure there could be no one within hearing, although possible that they might be seen by some belated passer-by at a distance. Soon after their disappearance, the light touch of oars broke in regular time on the night's stillness, and a dark shadow gliding into the white moonlight gave proof that they were gone for the present.

Tom rose silently but resolutely. He stepped out into the light and walked steadily towards the house.

"I have a right here," he thought, "and I am that much ahead of them."

CHAPTER XII.

AT BAY BLUFF AGAIN.

As he neared the house, Tom stepped lightly and looked cautiously about. The desolation and decay became more apparent upon a closer view, and as he turned the angle of the far side, he saw that there was a faint glimmer of light from the broken cellar window not visible before. At the same time there was a sharp, broken cough that had a strangely familiar sound. Tom stood up straight, and raised his face to the far-off, beautiful sky. That was his father's cough he knew. He was there, then.

He must go back. The children could not be left now. Fred must not be left uncontrolled and unwatched, for although far from considering himself amenable in any way to Tom's suggestions, Tom could and did keep the balance wavering between right and wrong. Without Tom, and with his father, there would be no consideration of the right for one-half minute.

But, first, he would see him. He would make doubly sure by creeping up to that window, and peeping over the break in the shutter. But why was he down in the cellar? The light burned steadily, though dimly, and there was no sound as of moving or packing away, as he at first supposed some one to be occupied. A low groan, followed

by the same cough, startled him, as he knelt down and put his face to the broken window.

He was so shocked by what he saw that he forgot to be on his guard.

There was a bedstead in the cellar (one that he remembered up-stairs in his father's room), but it had no bed on it, and only a coat or two thrown over the emaciated figure it held. It was his father, so thin, so worn, so white and ghastly, he would hardly have recognized him. His eyes were closed when he first saw him, but at the noise Tom made, they opened suddenly and in terror. Tom felt that he must see and know *him* at once, and he pushed aside the shutter with an impatient hand.

"Father! What is the matter? Has anybody done anything to you? Have you been here all this time?"

"Oh, Tom!"

It was a cry of relief and appeal. Tom looked at the small opening, tore off the sash and dropped through upon the cellar floor. He looked defiantly around as he sprang to his feet.

"There is no one here," said his father faintly, in answer to the look. "They will be back to-morrow night."

"And leave you alone until to-morrow night? You're a pretty sick man for loneliness like that."

"I'm worse than that. I am a dead man, all but the last breath. How did you know I was here?"

"I didn't know it. We thought you were—drowned."

"So Glascow said to-night. He met you in the woods, I know. Did you follow him?"

"No. I was going away. I was tired of it down there,

and I thought I'd start out in some strange place and begin over again."

His father looked at him pityingly.

"You always wanted things different," he said gravely. "Well, you were right. You are right. Go as you intended, and begin over again."

"I can't now," said Tom, simply. "I can't leave you now. And I'd better not let Fred get quite off the track. That fellow said he wanted one of us, and he'll get Fred. Not if I can help it, though."

There was a long, terrible spell of coughing. Tom raised his father, and held him until it was over and he had ceased to gasp. Then he laid him gently down.

"Don't stop for either of us!" feebly exclaimed the sick man. "We are not worth it, either of us. Go—go—while you can get away—before they come."

"I'll go up-stairs and get you out of this hole. What are you doing here?

"Can't burn a light up-stairs. It could not be hidden. And I could not lie here in the dark—not *here* of all places!"

"Why need you hide the light? Why don't you come home? It's better than this."

His father did not answer him. Tom looked at him steadily a moment, and then asked as steadily:

"Father, have you done anything that you have to hide from the law?"

"I—I—it isn't much. But I got in with a bad crowd. I went off with them. It seemed an easy life. But they have finished me."

Tom sat on the side of the wretched bed and watched

his father's impotent tears with a numb, aching sense of helplessness and loss. It was all over for him again. No hope, no future, and the children must grow up as he had, only worse, for they had no memory of their mother—no crumbling link with "better days" to keep them from even some little harm.

"Father, I won't leave you now. Let me get you out of here before they come back. I can hide you somewhere, if you must hide. But you won't ask me to stay with that gang, will you?"

His father gasped out something, and fell to coughing again. From that coughing attack he sank into a half-stupor, half-slumber, and Tom left him to determine what to do. He groped his way up the cellar-stairs and pushed open the door at the top which led into the side hall. From there he wandered through the rooms, planning for the future and thinking of the past, until the moon went down. Then he went back to his father in the cellar.

When morning came, he soon saw that there was no hope of removing his father. He was indeed at the last gasp—a dying man. Tom's mind was soon made up. He found some few pieces of furniture up-stairs in pretty good order, and he gathered them into one of the rooms where the view was fairest and widest. He went out to the barn, and brought in an armful of dry hay left in a sheltered corner, spread it on the cot, and smoothed it as well as he could. Then he carried the wasted form up to this poor apology for a comfortable room, and laid him down. He seemed to feel the change and be grateful for it, but he was very far gone. Tom had a little money with him—a very little, for he had left nearly all he had

with the storekeeper for the winter's stores, laughing when he did at his "taking time by the forelock." Now he went out to the nearest country store, and bought a few things of the plainest kind. As he hurried home, it flashed upon him that the gang had gone off the night before but would not return to-night. They had foreseen his father's death, and left him to die alone.

The end was not so near. Tom was ignorant of sickness. But the gang did not return that night. He and his father had their old home to themselves for some time forth, and the weeks wore on to months while they led their strangely lonely, hidden life, within the once laughter-ringing walls.

When his father rallied, he was better and stronger than had seemed possible, and quite capable of telling his story and deciding for himself what he would or would not do. He knew the secrets of the house, and he had a right—how obtained Tom dare not ask—to a share in the provisions and outfit stowed away in closets and bins once intended for far other uses. He was determined to remain there, and in spite of all Tom could urge, he persisted in his determination. And he kept Tom with him. From day to day and from night to night he raised the dismal specter of fast-approaching death, and while he told the boy to go, showed that he clung with all his feeble strength to his presence. Poor, poor Tom! All unconscious of the robbery at Gray Beach while within a few miles of the place, all ignorant of the suspicions and the search for him, he was fighting against time and death in a self-imposed imprisonment and devotion to one he could only pity and try not to despise. But he *did* try hard and conquered.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE "BLUE BERRY TREE."

October had glided into November imperceptibly, so golden and balmy were the days. The cottage had lost all its summer outing look, and was warm and cozy and homelike with its curtains and carpets, its open fireplaces and heaped-up wood-baskets. But the preparation had really been more for an ideal winter in the country than from any use they had yet been called upon to make of either fireplaces or wood-baskets. A few fragrant pine cones, or a few spicy chips and a bit of gray wreck kindled at evening for the sparkle and crackle of the many-colored jets of flame was all there had been any excuse for before Thanksgiving Day, which the village people kept more formally than the Marsdens were accustomed to see. This year, however, they heard so much of it from the children that it was a little more than a newspaper proclamation.

Milly had been promoted by this time from the wheeled chair to the pony carriage, and Albert gave place very often to Helena or Frank as its driver. With plenty of pillows and cushions, Milly could even act as her own driver, or could sit for hours holding the gentle "Lady-bird," while the others wandered around her within call, collecting or sketching. The carriage held three very

comfortably, and the girls had taken up both these pursuits with great zeal. Then there was always a child to pick up if the third seat "went begging." The school would not open until January, and Milly's heart was all in a class she had formed of the merry little wild birds who scoured the sands, racketed through the woods or climbed to the roof of every cottage in the place with the aid of its porches, shutters, and lightning-rods. They all seemed blessed with unseen wings, they went and came so safely and so swiftly through all sorts of dangers. Their open-air life and their constant open-eyed observation of all it presented had at last made her familiar with their knowledge of sea and shore, and kept them ever delightful companions to her.

They had talked a great deal of late of the "blue berry tree" which they intended to use to dress the schoolroom for some sort of Thanksgiving supper of their very own, for neither Miss Hilson nor the Ocean Cottage party were invited to share in it even as spectators of its "play." Still, it was freely discussed in their presence by the children, who were particularly eloquent as to the beauty of this "blue berry tree."

"That's not its right name. It's jumper or bird cedar or something——" began Annie Merton one day.

"Why, no, 'tain't, Annie! How you do talk!" corrected Leila and Emily in a breath. "It's juniper tree."

"It's gin bush," put in another little wiseacre. "You just ask Alissa if 'tain't. Her mother makes tea out of it."

"'Deed she don't, then. It's real pisen. 'Tain't good for one thing but pretty."

This was Louis Netterley, and there being forthwith a general "shindy," as some of them called it, he brought out the claim to knowledge of a superior order "'cause the bestest and biggest of all the trees grew out to Bay Bluff."

"You jest go out there, Miss Milly, and see if they don't. 'Tain't far—on'y 'bout five miles round the road."

"It is so, Louis Netterley. It's ten miles good. But the trees are bigger out there, sure enough. Grandfather and some of the men are going out there for Thanksgiving. They're going in Mr. Folsom's big wagon."

"I'm a-going, too," said Dan, who had not been with them before for a long time, and seemed bigger and rougher and more scowling than ever before.

"No, you are not, either. It's not a safe place for boys. There's a lot of tramps up there in the old barn. Grandfather says so, and he knows."

"Well, really, you all seem to be at cross-purposes to-day," said Milly. "I think I shall end these disputes this way—I shall go over to Bay Bluff and examine the trees myself. Whatever I decide upon you must agree to accept, or we cannot talk trees any more. I cannot have quarreling here, because it takes my strength even to listen."

"All right! We'll agree," they said good-naturedly enough, and forgot to contradict each other in the profuse directions and long catalogue of sights and scenes she was to look out for on the way there and back.

She went the next day. It was the longest drive she had attempted as yet, but she had heard many speak of its beauties, and the children's discussion had only strength-

ened her wish and determination to go there to the point of starting. Helena was her companion, and Albert occupied the odd seat at the back, for they must have a protector even "down there" when going such a distance.

They started early, but it was high noon when they reached the spot selected as their destination. It was on the edge of the open space surrounding the deserted Bay Bluff residence, and not far from the edge of the bluff—in short, very nearly on the spot where poor Tom Netterley had rested after his night's run more than four weeks earlier. The trees they had made the special object of their drive stood in a thick group a little to the south, making a deep, steel-blue touch of color amid the surrounding darker pines. They were certainly beautiful, and Milly begged for as many branches and bits as they could carry home, for lovelier and more fragrant decoration could not be found. She insisted that Helena should go to select, "the very prettiest of all," and Albert accompany her to cut them, while she would sit comfortably in the sunshine, and look at the bay and "make up" romances.

"There never was a place more suited to such making up," said Helena, "but Albert looks as if there might be something truer than fiction in the romance of the scene. What was it you said about the house, Albert? Is it haunted?"

"Albert is not a believer in 'haunts.' Are you, Albert?"

"Yes, ma'am, I is. W'en de rite time cums, I hain't agwine war no hants git a holt on me. But dat time hain't now. I's heap mo' skeered 'bout dem old tramps dey do say hez sot up der 'bode in dat house an' barn. Hit hain't

safe, Miss Milly, 'deed hit hain't, to leab you yer by you' lonesome selb."

"Why, Albert, you need not go out of sight. And I'll promise to make you hear if I need you. Now do go, for we must start home early."

They humored her, for, really, there seemed no reason in the fear they expressed. The stillness was unbroken, for the waters of the bay come in slowly and silently, unlike the smallest ocean wave. The long grass swayed a little in the wind, and it was so soothing and dreamy around her that Milly must have fallen into a doze, from which she was startled by a low, shocked, unfamiliar utterance of a most familiar sound.

"Miss Milly!" said some one at her side.

She opened her eyes on Tom Netterley.

In an instant she sat up wide awake and rather frightened. Something in his voice and more in his expression told her there was something to fear. He looked worn and white and wretched—besides, they had been searching everywhere for him without being able to find him or to hear of him.

"Oh, where have you been?" she cried, but in the suppressed voice his own exclamation suggested. "Why couldn't they find you? Oh, you didn't take it after all!"

In her confused awakening, whether from waking or sleeping dreams, the words came tumbling out before she could collect herself.

"Take what? Who looked for me?" was the sudden, sharp answer. "Who wants me more than I am wanted here?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" cried Milly, now fully alive to the relations between Tom Netterley and herself, which were certainly of the slenderest kind. "I only remembered —I was so surprised—that every one has been wondering where you had gone. And I never did believe you took it."

"Took what? There you go again!"

"Miss Hilson's silver box." Milly came out as directly as he could have wished. Then, as his blank and darkening face told the truth to her eyes: "It was taken about the time you went away, and Mayor Crescenz thinks you —thinks you might—find it."

The boy stood silent and staring for a long, long minute, but meeting the girl's clear eyes fearlessly.

"I never heard such a box was stolen—never, so surely as I stand here! But I see—I understand something I did not understand before. Mayor Crescenz is nearer right than he ought to be when he means only to suspect an innocent fellow, whose luck is down on him. I believe I can find it!"

"But what are you doing here?"

"What are *you* doing here?"

"I came—we came—the others are in there—to see the 'blue berry trees.' I sent them to get me some of the branches."

"Who are they?"

"Miss Marsden and her servant. Albert, you know."

His face took a sudden firmness and decision.

"They'll be back in a minute or two, and I don't want them to see me. But you are safe, since they are with you. Miss Milly, you've done lots of good since you came to

Gray Beach, and I believe you belong to people who are always doing good. You're a Catholic, ain't you?"

"No," faltered Milly. "Not—not yet. But the others are. And they are good."

"Well, I'll risk it. I've got to, and be quick about it. Miss Milly, you know everybody thought my father was drowned last year?"

"Yes."

"He wasn't—he's here. He's in that house, hiding and dying. Yes, it's true."

Milly's pale face of shocked fear and pity braced him to the telling of his tale quickly and strongly.

"I never knew it until last month. I found him here. I was going to leave these parts, and start out in life for myself, and make something of myself like the other Netterleys—we belong to a good family—and I came here, where my mother died, the night I left, and found him. Miss Milly, I couldn't go—I couldn't leave him. And he's dying—he really is. It's awful—you can't think it half as awful as it is. There's a lot of tramps and thieves and such camped out in that house—it's safe enough, and it's handy and near the bay where they can slip in. Father went off with them last year, and now he's in their power, and he's afraid of them and he's afraid of the law. Oh, Miss Milly, you don't know what I have been through! But I can't go while he lives. It won't be long now—it *can't*. And I want you to tell your priest. *Their* priest, I mean, but it's all the same. Don't tell any one else till you've told him. I'll trust him to know what to do—what to tell and what to keep. Father used to be a Catholic and mother, too, but—they forgot it. I've watched

that priest, though, and I know he's good. He'll never fail you. But don't—for the good Lord's sake, don't tell any one till you've told him."

"Will it get you into trouble?"

"Never mind that. I can't get into worse trouble than I'm in here and now. I never did anything to hide from the law—never once in my life, and you believe me. I've had no chance, but I've tried to do the best I could. I don't belong to these men any way at all, and I don't pretend to them I do. They know I'm only here for father. They're bad, but they let me do for him. They're not here to-day—off on some mischief. When I first found father they were off, and when they did come, I am pretty sure they brought that box. Here comes the lady! Miss Milly, give me your word you'll tell him first!"

"I will tell the priest as soon as I get home, and I will tell no one else until I have told him."

It was solemnly said. Tom's face brightened. He took his hand from the wheel where he had rested it in his earnestness, waved it gratefully, and dropped out of sight into the tall grass. The next minute, Milly saw him slip over the edge of the bluff while she was welcoming and admiring and making a general diversion of the heaped-up "blue berry tree."

CHAPTER XIV.

A "HELPING HAND."

It was a silent drive home. Helena talked at first, but she soon found that Milly was not in the humor, and fearing that she might be overtired, arranged the cushions deftly and drew her into the curve of one arm so that she rested so comfortably against her shoulder that she did indeed sink into the light sleep which came to her now so easily and always with health on its wings. She did not wake until they were driving through the woods and near the church. With the first glimpse of its overhanging roof, she remembered Tom's commission, and a sudden inspiration prompted her to see if she could arrange an interview at once and tell his story.

"O Helena! let us stop and leave some of these beautiful branches here. We can, just as easily as not, for I am not tired now—not at all tired. You can put some on the altar, and the whole place will be fragrant with our offering."

It was one of the "ways" the Marsdens had with Milly—as well as with many another non-Catholic friend—never to speak to her of their faith unsolicited, but never to hesitate to reply to any question she might ask, and always at any cost to themselves of time or exertion to take her into the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament

whenever it was possible, particularly if she expressed a wish to go. What might not come of even one single moment of time there! What might not our dear Lord lovingly bestow upon one who came before Him—above all, upon one wishing to leave an offering on His altar even in loving ignorance?

To turn the horse's head into the quiet corner between the church and the house was the work of a moment. Albert crawled out from the heaped-up greenery he was guarding on the back seat, and lifted Milly from her cushions. Father Morgan came from the house porch to welcome them, but Helena explained that they had not time for the call at the house which he urged.

"Put me down on the step, Albert, and carry some of the branches into the church for Miss Helena. You can carry me in when you have done that, and I can wait for her. I want to speak to Father Morgan now, if he has time to spare to me."

Father Morgan had plenty of time, and he seated himself smilingly on the step for a little pleasant chat. But Milly explained to him at once and with directness which gave proof of its importance that she had a commission to discharge of a serious nature, and of which she must rid herself speedily and secretly.

"If I have time, I shall tell you all now, but if we are interrupted before I finish, will you please see that I have another chance as soon as possible? I think it is a matter of life and death."

Quickly and concisely as possible, she told Tom's story, and Father Morgan listened intently.

"Tell this to Mrs. Marsden as soon as you reach home,"

he said at the close, "for it may be necessary to consult with her and with you, and thus all awkwardness may be avoided. I do not know what might result if the story were to get abroad, but I hope great good may come of this, my child. That poor Tom Netterley! I feel almost as though he had been neglected, and yet—there is so much to do, and it must be so delicately done. But we can surely help him now, and break up a nest of the old serpent, the evil one."

Helena came out then and Albert carried in the helpless girl who was still trying to help others. He bore her reverently to the altar rail, and supported her while she admired the fair beauty of the spotless white and rich dark green of linen and cedar around the Tabernacle. It was only for a passing moment, but her prayer went out from her very heart—for her own wants and for the far poorer and more helpless dying man and his son, and for the whole world in pain and sorrow.

She went immediately to her room on her return home, knowing that Mrs. Marsden would follow her there to see that she had not over-exerted herself and was able to find rest. Mrs. Marsden had a gentle mother's nature to begin with, and was most conscientiously faithful in the discharge of her self-assumed duties towards Mr. Aveling's cherished daughter. Her constant thought was first for the lonely girl—who richly repaid her affectionate interest by a love as tender as a daughter's and as grateful as only a fine nature feels for sympathy and consideration.

"You must lie down at once, Milly dear, and sleep if you can until tea is ready. No, we must not talk—not even to Frank, who has been lonely enough without you

both. Go out, Frank! You really must leave her in quiet."

"A moment, please—just a moment!" as Frank reluctantly withdrew. "It is something Father Morgan said I should tell you as soon as I reached home, and I cannot rest until I do. I have seen Tom Netterley! I believe we have found Miss Hilson's box!"

The suppressed excitement was telling on Milly now, or she would never have made so dramatic an announcement. But she was a sensible girl, and the rest of the story was more in her usual style. Mrs. Marsden was all interest, of course, and she perfectly understood the relief it was to tell her.

"Well, that was a strange thing to happen—but things do not happen. You were sent there to help, dear. You see how often your helplessness seems to help other people? Tom Netterley has heard of you through the compassionate kindness of the people and the children who have been so attentive to you, and then, you seemed removed to his fancy from the matter-of-fact world around you. He had courage to trust you when he could not have trusted any one with two swift feet to carry his secret far and wide."

She stooped to kiss the sensitive, earnest face, and Milly put her arm around her neck.

"But—he thought I was a Catholic," she said, softly. "That was what did it. He believed in them."

"Thank God if that is true! Oh, if only we were true to Our Lord's teaching and example, they must all believe—all who do not know Him yet! But there is the 'little leaven' even here."

"There is a good deal of it here," said Milly, as she settled herself on her pillow, for she saw Mrs. Marsden was ready to leave her because she thought she ought to go to sleep. "The other day we were coming by the church, and the children begged me to stop with them and let them see inside the door. Albert carried me, and we went just inside. I wish you could have seen the dear little faces! They never said a word, but little Alissa put her little brown hands together with such a look of reverence and love and peace! And the others were so good. I think they feel without knowing it—what is in the midst of their homes. I—I know I do."

She closed her eyes resolutely, and shut out so far as she could every thought that could disturb and excite her. She, too, was conscientious in her efforts to get well. The unspoken thought was always there, and she determined to do all she could, painful, tiresome, irritating, useless as it might seem.

"And, if, after all is done that I can do, I am no better I shall know it is God's will to keep me so. I believe then I can give up and be glad. There are so many blessings. But there are trials and sorrows, too, and if it is not His will,—if He leaves it to me and I am a coward or lazy—then He may take the blessings away. And there is papa! For his sake, I must not let a chance slip."

Some such thought was in her mind as she curbed heart and brain, and held herself to the quiet which brought sleep. The drive did her no harm, and although the silvery gleam of the berried branches and their strange spicy odor always recalled the face of Tom Netterley and his agitated voice, nothing of the excitement through

which she had passed seemed to remain with her after she awoke from her slumber.

Father Morgan had a difficult matter to adjust within his own mind. What Tom had said of his father's having been a Catholic and what Milly had graphically shown to be Tom's own position and desire, added more than common interest to the matter. He wished it were possible to go at once to the lonely boy, and, with him, to bring about some change in his father's condition and his own. But "there was so much to do and it had to be so delicately done." The community at large had no love for the Netterleys and no belief in any goodness possible to them. To call attention to the Bay Bluff house, to bring to notice the fact that it was really occupied by a gang of "roughs" and that "old Netterley" and Tom were there, would render it impossible to help poor Tom or to separate him from the disgrace and the consequences that would forever shadow and oppress him.

Yet he must see to it that the house was cleared and the country at large protected from the ravages of the gang. Miss Hilson's silver box was not the only valuable that had disappeared of late. There had been slight thefts in Brighton-on-the-Sea, and in two or three small country towns and villages, which were evidently the work of practised hands. He would have liked to go at once to Mayor Crescenz and put it all under his direction. But some effort must be made to reach Tom first.

He went down the next morning to see Mrs. Marsden, and hear again what Milly had told him hurriedly, if clearly. Then he drove at once over to Bay Bluff, alone

but prepared, at least, to defend himself if need be, with a stout stick he had not forgotten how to handle in many peaceful years.

He was too late. The men from the village had gone over for the "greens" an hour earlier, and had gone in strong force, determined to sweep the house and barn, if they found tramp or trace of tramp. Men were flitting to and fro, calling to each other and shouting out discoveries, but they were all well-known faces and familiar voices to Father Morgan as he drove across the once carefully tended lawn.

"Well, I declare, Mr. Herbert, I never expected to find you one of 'the gang,'" he saluted Leila's grandfather as he drew up before the porch.

"No more didn't I expect to find you hobnobbing with them," laughed the jolly old gentleman, "but we've caught *you*, at any rate. Better one of 'em than none of 'em."

"Then they had warning!" exclaimed the priest. "Did they leave traces you can make use of to follow any one? I heard of a sick man here—a dying man—and I thought it a duty to investigate matters. But I was not sure, until I heard of him, that there was any one in the old house. Was it more than rumor, do you think?"

"Don't have to think. It's all as plain as print. They must have gone off in a hurry, for they are gone and no mistake, and left all sorts of rubbish but a dyin' man behind 'em. Come in—come in! Just see for yourself!"

Father Morgan saw for himself. The lower rooms were bare enough, but those in the upper stories were heaped

with a confused medley of provisions and old clothes, newspapers and worthless books, some few articles of comparative worth, and one or two of the stolen things recognized by different members of the party. A fine telescope, securely mounted at the window having the widest sweep of view across country, had been taken several weeks before from the house of a pilot in Brighton. This was in one of the rooms under the roof. In one of the second story rooms there was a fairly comfortable bed, a table on which was a bottle of medicine, a chair and several books of a better class. This, he felt, must have been the room where Tom nursed and watched his father.

"You see," said old Mr. Herbert, "they've been here, sure enough. They must have had a fellow on the look-out and when our wagon came in sight before we got to the long lane, they scented danger and put out. Tide's all right for it, and their boats were always ready. That's the way we come to be sure they were here. Seen the boats every other time or two we come round this way 'most all summer."

There was nothing for it but to swallow the disappointment. The men from the village solaced themselves with a close search, the recovery of the stolen goods and the confiscation of everything of any value, and with their festival boughs. But Father Morgan drove home slowly and thoughtfully. He was relieved, but he was saddened and anxious.

Milly was depressed and grieved for several days, and forced to keep it to herself. Naturally, her part in the adventure impressed her more than if she had been "like

other girls," and able to change the scene at will or seek new interests when the humor seized her. Then, she did pity the Netterleys. They had been one of her fancies and self-imposed cares ever since she first heard of them—more than ever now.

CHAPTER XV.

A DULL CHRISTMAS FOR SOME PEOPLE.

"MOTHER, do you know that next Thursday will be Christmas Day? Next Thursday, mind! Not even a week off."

"Yes, I know it—I certainly do know it, but I do not feel it in the least. There is nothing in the air that breathes of Christmas."

"That is exactly what I meant to express. I never spent such a Christmas in my life. I have made all my Christmas presents, and I go up and look them over twenty times in the day to stir up some kind of feeling. But it seems so early for it."

"I think that is the weather. Roses in bloom and a green bank under one's window is something most un-Christmas-like to us. Then, it is so quiet. No one around us prepares, and we have lived where the whole community went wild over the Christmas holidays. But when you and Helena find yourselves on Chestnut street, you will find Christmas, never fear! Now be off with you, for it is almost train time."

"I wish you were going, Milly!" said Helena, as she kissed her good-by. "It's the first Christmas since we have known each other that we have not been in the stores together."

"You will have the more to tell me," said Milly cheerfully. "You must both come home with all the news you can carry. And do not forget to come home!"

"To-morrow! To-morrow!" cried Frank, waving her umbrella as she ran out the gate. Mrs. Marsden and Milly returned to their unfinished breakfast.

"I wonder if I shall ever feel like the old-time Christmas again!" said Milly a little wistfully. "It used to be the most wonderful day in all the year."

"I think it will be again, dear," said Mrs. Marsden—to whom alone Milly expressed the shade of sadness that occasionally darkened her spirit. "I look forward for days of happiness for you—not backward. I see you improving each day in mind and body, and we have such encouraging news from your father of his health and fortunes that you may say even now your lines have fallen to you in pleasant places, with glad hope in the future. And if you should have a cross to bear, you have shown yourself ready and willing to fill the breaks in your old life. Yes, I hope even this may be a happy Christmas, when you think of it—and of all that Christmas means."

"It shall be!" said Milly after a little thought. "I remember I have said that I could not understand how Christmas Day *could* be sorrowful to any one. It seemed to me then that every care or sorrow or regret ought to be lost entirely in the meaning of the day, if it has any meaning at all. To people who are good Christians, I mean. To Catholics above all. Now I shall practise my own theory, for I know all it should mean, and it *must*. What kind of a time are they going to have here, Albert? You go

about a good bit—do you see and hear 'Christmas in the air'?"

"Sometimes I doz an' sometimes I dozen't. Dar's a heap o' cookin' in some of dese houses, an' de bery nex' house—hit hain't got nothin' to cook."

"O Albert! You don't mean that really?"

"I ralely an' truly does. Dat little ooman wif ten or 'leben chil'ens ober yander by ole Mis' Herbert's house—she hain't got one libin' ting fer dem chil'ens dis day. I hea' dat baby axin' fer sumpin' to eat, an' she hain't got hit to gib him."

"But—it might be she did not want to give it to him then?"

"No, ma'am, Mis' Marsden, I don' mean dat. Mis' Herbert, she say she know dat so wif dat ooman, an' she mus' dess holp her. An' Mr. Folsom, he say so, too. But you know, Mis' Marsden, ole' Mis' Herbert an' Mr. Folsom, dey got ter holp eve'ybody. Dey can't fill up dem whole ten, 'leben chil'ens deyselbs."

"Well, I suppose you could help a little, if I help you?" Albert chuckled.

"I reckin you 'bout right, Miss Milly. If Mis' Marsden, she gib me some advisement, I kin holp shuah."

"We'll all advise together, Albert," said Mrs. Marsden, "and make more than a dull Christmas to some people outside of the house as well as in."

The result of the "advisement" was that Helena and Frank came home the next evening to find themselves eagerly expected and wonderful works in progress. Mrs. Marsden had tact and heart-warmth. People opened their skeleton closets to her, and talked of modest chari-

ties they would not have owned to many. She had a chat with Mr. Folsom and a call on Mrs. Herbert to use with good intent. Not as the well-to-do seeking the less fortunate to dispense Christmas duty charity, but as the kindly neighbor interested and sympathetic, feeling the pressure of the link forged by the Creator between every one He brings near. "Yes, Mrs. Marsden, I might as well tell you that you Ocean Cottage folks are a heap of comfort to poor Mrs. Donny. She told me no longer ago than yesterday that many a time you give her children the only mouthful of victuals they get in the whole day. I know you had no such thought, for it comes just as natural as breathing to hand the children a piece, don't it, now? I'm sure I find it so, for that Leila of mine is always ready for it and I take it all the others are Leila over again. But they don't all have the comforts her grandfather has provided for her and me. I tell her that, and she's real good about taking notice in a quiet way, and real generous about sharing with others. She often whispers to me 'Em'ly hasn't had her breakfast yet, and it's dinner time now.' Or else, 'Jimmy Donny's looking at the cake real hard. Let me give him my piece.' And I always let her give it to him without giving her another in its place. I tell you what, Mrs. Marsden, the people that has it has to learn to do without it or they'll never find they have enough to go round with the people that hasn't it."

Mrs. Marsden and Mrs. Herbert came very near each other in that afternoon talk, and Mrs. Herbert decided after they separated that she would go over to Mrs. Marsden's church some morning. "It must be a good

enough church that helps to make a rich woman like that so homely like," she concluded, "and it don't seem very Christian-like never to go near them—specially when there is no other church nearer than Brighton."

Mrs. Marsden went home by the beach to think it out. It was so with them all, that habit of going home by the beach when they were in the mood for thinking. It was calm and bright and still, with a light on the sea like a quiet smile on a peaceful face. Such an hour never comes to a crowded city, not even to the highest story of its tallest building, although they are lifted into the light indeed. How natural it had always been to connect such stories as she had just heard with the city streets and alleyways, while how far real want had always seemed for the country! At Roseburn, there really were no poor—no hungry poor. Money was plenty, work was plenty, wages were high, and comfort, at least, was within reach of every one except the criminally idle and wasteful, who were soon expected to "move on" and moved accordingly.

But here it was different. Money only came to Gray Beach in the pockets of the summer guests. There was but the brief three months' harvest, and to those who could not sow and reap in that time there was no further gleam of sunshine unless they could fish or "go oystering." The widow and the fatherless must depend upon the open hand, always extended even when thinly veiled or lightly crossed with silver. Could it be possible, Mrs. Marsden asked herself, that those blithe and merry little ones came often under her roof hungry and uncomplaining? The fellowship of childhood, that true democracy which heeds neither coat nor color, had presented the

children all in one light, and while she had noted some slight difference in the outer garb, she had supposed it owing to less taste, less industry, less interest in such matters, rather than to a difference of means in their different homes. Yet here were children running in and out side by side, some of whom were well fed and well clothed, while the others were penniless and empty and clad in all they possessed, scanty as was the allowance. And she had never suspected it. Truly, they were of sterner stuff than she had thought, sturdily uncomplaining, proudly reticent, even in their babyhood. A mighty people is bred up within the sound of the waves in more lands than one or two.

So Mrs. Marsden went home, with a look towards the cross on the spire, and a prayer from her heart to the Sacred Heart to which the cross belongs. And she and Milly, sitting cozy over their tea, quiet enough without the girls, talked and planned and pitied and grew eager in lovely fashion.

The next morning they began their labors, with Albert and his gathered wisdom to assist. Miss Hilson, too, was summoned and replied gladly. She had been away for some time, vainly trying to trace her valued box. Milly and Mrs. Marsden dared not tell her what they knew, although Milly was firm in the belief that Tom Netterley would appear and reveal something that might lead to its recovery or to the certainty of its fate.

Time was short, but with Brighton-on-the-Sea only a few miles away, and a purse with a bottom farther off than Brighton, much could be accomplished in a few days. Mrs. Marsden had intended a family feast, of course, but

strictly confined to her own family. With both the fathers away, she and the three girls would keep it alone this year, and next year—well! Wonderful things, as Mrs. Marsden often said, might happen in a year. But now, in the light of recent revelations, the feast must change its order, and must bring in the many from the wayside. How to get them was the question. It must be done informally and must include all, or they could not get hold of the Netterleys, who *must* come.

It was Frank who solved the riddle.

"We'll have a Christmas tree," she decided, rising up and calmly announcing it with the manner she always assumed when a disputed point cleared itself a path through the mists of her mind.

"A Christmas tree!" exclaimed the others aghast. "A Christmas tree with two days for preparation, and not one thing to put on it within reach! You must be crazy."

"I am as sane as ever I was in my life. It's the only thing that will do it right. We'll have a Christmas tree, and invite all the children—and any one else who likes—to come to see it on Christmas morning about eleven o'clock. Then we shall have the table set out, and the dinner ready, and we shall invite them in. The table shall stand all the rest of the day, and every one who comes in shall be taken out and treated as well as we know how. Every one will be welcome, will know that he is welcome, and will not feel that there is any favor shown. For these people are properly proud, let me tell you. They are out-and-out Americans, and they know no superiors. They are polite and kind to everybody and

they insist on the same treatment or on being left to themselves. And that is my speech!"

"It is a credit to you, Frank, and I believe you have hit on the best solution, if there was only time."

"There is time, mother! First, we'll get the tree—a 'blue berry tree.' Then, we'll hang it all over with candles,—we can get them over at Brighton; apples, oranges, sticks of candy, nuts, bags of sweets and sours, cakes with holes in them and with little white dogs on them, and then those lovely cards we have. We have Christmas cards, Easter cards, advertisement cards, birthday cards, and some pious pictures. We will put them everywhere, and the great angel with the trumpet on top, Helena's *creche* under the tree on the moss, and my Holy Night on the wall beside the tree. It will look lovely—I can see it now—and it shall have this further merit. Every one who comes to look at it shall take something off it with his own hand. It shall stand until New Year's Eve, and they shall pluck of its fruit as many times as they visit it—for we can fill up the gaps between visits."

There was a clapping of eager hands, and one universal assent.

"I think I see it, too!" cried Miss Hilson, "and I know it will be beautiful. It cannot help it, for there is nothing brighter and more fascinating than Christmas cards at Christmas time. They can never go out of fashion for me, for their color, their delicacy, their grace have always seemed worthy a longer life than the mere glance most people give them. I have some, too."

"But yours are memories, Miss Hilson," said Milly, "and we have not any memories yet. Don't bring us yours

to use, but bring them to me to look at with you. I have come far enough to love other people's memories."

Frank had already brought down a great box of cards, which, she explained, she and Helena had brought from home to cover a screen—a plan they had long had, but could not find time for at Roseburn.

"We thought there would be nothing to do here, and we should have to put in time all sorts of ways. But I never have a spare moment, I give you my word. There is so much that is real here it pushes all the make-believes and put-ins out of sight. But, after all, we brought these for something real, it seems. Real pleasure to the little ones, you know."

Mrs. Marsden looked silently and tenderly upon her girls. They were "real," she thought. Little things could be made to serve their purpose gleefully, and they passed easily over many disappointments, going peacefully and blithely forward, because they knew something of the higher things intended to claim their thoughts. They were getting farther and farther away from the "infinitely little" with each day of their simple, natural home-life by the sea.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHRISTMAS INDEED!

THE day was perfect. Early—very early—while it was yet dark and cold and still as the grave, the Marsdens were off to Mass, but, as ever, the walk on Christmas morning was no hardship, and the little church, fragrant, glowing, and so peaceful, was a haven of refuge from the night and its chill. There was quite a large congregation, for Milly and the children, approaching the subject together as outsiders—with a difference—had openly discussed the reason for Christmas, and her regrets at not being able to go to "early church" had kindled in the sympathetic little people's hearts a desire to go, since they could. Gradually, too, a good many Catholics had crept out from the veil of uncertainty under which they had hidden. Not a few of the Point settlers had been Catholics "fo' de wah" and had left it as a whispered legend to their children. The lights on this morning shone on more than a sprinkling of dark faces, eager and curious, but reverent. The Marsden party were a long time in church, staying for all three Masses, and they walked home in the pure glow of a sunrise that blessed the earth undimmed.

And there was the Christmas tree! It was unique and

beautiful, and the whole house was spicy and odorous from it and its attendant garlands and pine branches. The Holy Night hung on one wall of the angle in which it was placed, and on the other, Miss Hilson had hung a large copy of the Sistine Madonna, her gift to the household. The great white-winged angel with a silver trumpet which always accompanied the girls in their home, wherever it might be, since it came to them one Christmas from over the seas—it was a pasteboard angel, exquisitely painted and of lovely face—was hung on the very topmost spray, and a perfect avalanche of the cards Frank had suggested fell from its feet to the lower boughs. The tree was large, and covered with the beautiful little round blue berries, shining like some new jewels in the light of the tiny candles which Albert had lighted to greet them on the homecoming. Fruit, nuts, candies, yards and yards of ribbons cut into lengths that might easily be taken off and borne away as a Christmas token just as they pleased the little maids who were to come within their toils, and tiny bags and bags of marbles and nails and tacks and screws for any boy who liked were scattered here and there.

"I know they will like nails and screws, and all those things, for we never go out that I do not overhear bargaining and buying and wishing and longing going on among the boys for those very things," said Milly, when they laughed at her commissions the day before on Albert's last trip to Brighton. "And I don't see why I should not give them any luxury they crave, whether it is of iron or gold. Either metal will be Christmas-like, if the will goes with it."

Then she had made all the little bags and put a dime in the bottom of each to come out as a surprise.

"It does not matter how they go," she said, "for every fellow will be bargaining and exchanging almost before they leave the room, and before night they will probably go the rounds. But I know the children now, and those who are shrewd and gain all, will be generous and share all. That's the way they do, and I encourage them in it. The shrewd ones all over the world will get the best away from the others and take better care of it, but it does not turn out worse for either party, if only kindly generosity goes hand in hand with the successful ones."

"There you go, Milly!" said Frank; "you are getting to tack a moral on to everything. You did not use to, but I don't care, for it makes you talk more than you used to, and you were much too quiet."

"Oh, I don't want to go about with a string of morals! How horrid! But it comes of having to think out things to fill up the time. I am so afraid of getting tired and cross."

"Cross, Milly! No one else ever thinks of such a thing, I can tell you."

"No one in this house ever gets cross except Albert, the Right Hand," said Frank. "Here he comes now in a towering rage, gesticulating and mouthing like an actor. Mother, open the window and ask him what ails him, just to see the change."

"Albert, what is it?" called Mrs. Marsden, doing as she was bidden in a spirit of mischief. "Has anything happened to the horse?"

In one instant Albert's face was on a broad grin.

"No, ma'am, Mis' Marsden. Dar hain't notin' de matter. I'se dess projeckin' and speculatin'. I bin an' dun ebery las' ting dess so."

Which was all true. Albert was a capital messenger and could substitute what he could get for what he could not get most satisfactorily. The girls crowded around his packages, to add another story to his innocent conceit in his own powers by their satisfaction and their praises.

And now, here on Christmas morning, their completed task of love and duty—the duty of ministering to others' happiness—made bright and lovely their own home in a strange land. Milly was sitting before it with a happy countenance, and the others greeted her admiration mingling with their good wishes.

"God makes the features, but men make their own countenances," thought Mrs. Marsden, with a dim remembrance of the words and a perfect recollection of the sense in which Cardinal Manning has clothed a truth. "Neither of my three girls are 'professional beauties,' but the three sweet faces grow finer each day. Milly's eyes are lovely, but it is the beautiful soul looking through them which makes them so : she grows upward all the time, chained as she is. Come to breakfast, you children ! Your company will come before you are ready for them just as they used to in the 'good old times' I hear you talk of. Is it a happy Christmas, Milly dear ?"

"Oh, indeed, it is ! I have quite forgotten there ever was any other kind outside, because it is all right within."

Albert, again, was the good fairy of the banquet, for he had placed the gifts entrusted to him by Mrs. Marsden around each plate and on the chairs before them. These

were altogether unexpected, for they had been carefully secreted until the last moment, and as each girl had had a Christmas letter with a check and had already written and sent a letter of Christmas wishes and thanks to her father, they felt that their share was prematurely disposed of before the Holy Day. But friends and relatives had remembered that no place on earth lies without the pale of Christmas Day, and beautiful, useful, dainty things had come in, besides a great box from South America a month before, which Mr. Folsom had carefully guarded and Mrs. Marsden and Albert had unpacked in his store-room. Breakfast grew cold before they thought of it, and the patter of little feet on the porch roused the party from their delightful chatter before it was fairly at an end.

"Annie Merton and Mander—what is that child's last name ?—and Em'ly Donny," announced Helena from her seat near the window. "And there comes one of the 'P'inters,' as they say."

Frank stood for a moment, and made the sign of the cross reverently. "I do so want it all to go off right and give them pleasure," she said as she caught her mother's eye.

"I think it will, dear," was the quiet answer with a gentle smile of confidence, and Frank followed the other two, Helena pushing Milly's chair, to the meeting with their first guests.

Everything certainly did "go off right." It was a whole day's reception, for many of the children went home and brought their parents and the other children to see and to hear and to feast. Helena played for them and Frank sang, Mrs. Marsden and Milly entertained

and dispensed the trifles from the tree. The Donnys, straggling in with different parties, were particularly well cared for at the table, and each instalment carried something home for "Momma," politely reluctant, at first, as any children from the homes of plenty. Yet Mrs. Herbert, who came a second time with Leila—the second time to bring her husband—told Mrs. Marsden that she knew there was neither a crumb of bread, a drop of milk, nor a chip nor a coal for fire in their pretty little cottage until she and Mr. Folsom went in with a Christmas greeting and a little "neighboring."

The Netterleys did not appear. Milly's inquiries of the other children met with but vague replies. The cautious little Alissa did say that her "Poppa," was afraid "they was up to no good," and had gone away to keep out of trouble. But she ventured on no further remarks and silently received all questions with an unmoved face.

The children did not say much that day. It was all too new and too unexpected. This great tree so wonderfully laden with fruit had grown up in a single night, for Annie and Leila had stopped there the day before and had seen nothing of it. But they gazed and gazed and wandered to and fro before it in a way that evinced their delight. It was after that, when they came day after day for six days to make its acquaintance, that they gave forth new views and original ideas upon each separate decoration, and left behind them in the memories of their entertainers a fund of wit and wisdom, both quaint and pathetic. "Oh, what we should have lost if we had not had a Christmas tree!" exclaimed Helena, when it was over with and Albert had closed the door upon its

denuded boughs, swept up its fallen sprigs, and hung the Sistine Madonna in the place of honor at the head of the room.

"I take all the credit of that old-fashioned idea to myself," said Frank, "and I made something new out of it, after all."

"You simply returned to first principles," said her mother, "as do others who aim at originality. Years ago, when the first Christmas tree ever heard of in this part of the country—if not on this side the ocean—was set up for a party of children of whom I was one, it was very like yours. And every child, every caller at the house for the holiday time had a gift from that tree. The later Christmas trees, hung with gauze and paper dolls, colored glass balls and tinsel stars were sparkling and gaudy enough, but they were poor substitutes for the real thing. The 'mustn't touch' made them stiff and unreal and the reappearance year after year of the same pretty things that were never the children's very own, spoiled them as pleasant memories. 'To have and to hold,' crowns a child's pleasure."

"Then these children have been crowned kings and rulers, for they certainly made that tree their own. But how good they were about it! No quarreling, no snatching, no mean spirit of envy all the time. And positively, mother, the little Donnys began to fatten. Well, I am glad we were here to help even the Donnys! I feel more like doing for my kind now that I have seen the effect of what I have tried to do. I like to come right down to the 'touch and go' of Christian charity—'touch' the poor with your own life, I mean, and 'go' right off and

do for them. Do you see, mother, I am catching Milly's way of moralizing ? What do you think of it ? "

"I think you had better go over and ask Miss Hilson what she thinks of it. You have been so busy and I have been so busy all the week that we have not cared half enough for her. I do not think she is well. She still worries over the loss of her box. But I think it was the chloroform and the shock which completely prostrated her for the time, at least. She ought not to live alone this winter."

"Oh, bring her over here ! Do, mother, do ! May I ask her ? May I coax her ? "

"Oh, yes ! " chorused Milly and Helena.

"Yes—yes, if you can ! " said Mrs. Marsden, after a moment's thought. "But, Frank—wait and I will go with you. I really think it would be a good thing and we will try to carry it through at once."

It was carried through, and before night Miss Hilson's desk-table, writing-chair, and chief treasures were safely lodged in the room next Milly's, the old servant was packing for her departure next morning on a long-desired visit to her daughter, and Miss Hilson herself was sipping her tea in a cozy circle, with no shrinking consciousness of a dark walk to her lonely home in the near future.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN BLUE AND WHITE.

Miss Hilson rejoiced in spirit when she awoke the next morning in the strange white bed, for a new face was put upon the world in the night. It was snowing fiercely, with that steady, swift downfall that looks to the stranger to snow as if it might never forget to fall. Such a thing had not happened in Gray Beach in the seven years she had lived there, and she could not but think while dressing of the many inconveniences she must have suffered in her cottage, where there was small provision for cold weather. Here it was all in order for storm or sun, and she was in it all.

Albert reported at breakfast time that the morning train had gone through as usual, and Miss Hilson's Mary had gone on it. But there would be no more trains from Gray Beach to Brighton-on-the-Sea until the storm abated. There had already fallen enough snow to make the journey difficult, for the high winds on the coast had swept the snow into deep, uncertain drifts, which lay chiefly in the way of the trains.

Mrs. Marsden went away at once to inspect the kitchen stores, and prepare for any possible falling short. She had not much anxiety on that score, but Helena and Frank had really made great progress in the housekeeping, and she had gradually left more and more to them,

so at this time she felt it very necessary to be her own guide in the matter, as they could hardly have provided for unforeseen blockades.

The girls and Miss Hilson stood near the windows and talked about it. It was colder and sterner-looking with the sea as a gray background than snow had ever seemed before. And the white, wide heavens were an unfamiliar canopy.

"I don't think I like it," said Frank doubtfully. "Do you suppose there will be sleighing?"

"I don't suppose there is a sleigh or a sled or a pair of runners in the whole county. Where there is never any snow, why should people fill up corners in the barn and break their legs falling over such useless things as sleds or runners—not to mention more expensive things like sleighs that have to be covered and cared for or they fall to pieces. We had trouble enough with such things at Roseburn."

"Ah, well, Helena, the outfit for sleighing down here will not be such as you were used to in Roseburn, but it will happen along here, all the same. I have seen this very quiet people meet several emergencies, and they do it very cleverly—very cleverly indeed."

And, sure enough, the milk-boy brought next morning's milk on a sleigh after twenty-four hours of the first snow he had ever seen. Two long poles from the woods, fastened together in an erratic but "hold-fast" manner, a store box secured to them, flat on the snow, an old horse harnessed between the poles before the box, the dinner-bell hung to the horse's neck—and a jolly boy to officer the craft, steer it through billows of snow, and "scud

it" through and over bare spots and sanded grass. For the winds had blown tremendously and the sand had poured in volumes over the marshes, and mingled with the snow. It was still snowing, and the ice was coming in on the waves of the rising tide and piling up on the beach.

A curious, awe-inspiring, nightmare sort of week followed. The weather broke the record for that part of the coast. The ice extended far out into the open water, and on the west, Great Bay lay vast and white and firm, a narrow channel which seemed to the eye scarcely a yard in width and of the deepest, most vivid blue when the sun shone, of the most intense black when the sky was clouded. The whole was depressing and saddening and strange as a foreign land. "It only needs two polar bears and a man with a spear and a shaggy coat like another bear on its hind legs, to go for a picture in a geography of the Arctic regions," said Frank. "For my part, I never wish to see snow or ice again. They are terribly desolate down here. And I used to think they were jolly at home—never could get enough of them!"

Milly did not mind it. She had many a quiet hour in the very room with the others while they chatted, for she could draw her chair into the window recess, fold her silken down quilt around her—it was quite cold enough for such protection unless very near the fire—draw it over her head, and watch the beach and dream. But one thing disturbed her—the grind of the ice on the beach. It was piled now fully ten feet high, and as the tide rose and fell this rugged wall of crystal fretted on the sands with a heavy sullen roar and crash, thrilling the house with sickening throes. At night, when the lighthouse sent its

weird radiance flashing across the ice mountains and valleys, it was no less awful. It seemed useless, too, for not a sign of life on the vast waste appeared for several days, and they concluded that no vessel of any kind would attempt to beat up the bay or down the channel, while anything outside of the ice would probably do its best to stay there.

But on the sixth day Annie Merton—the children were about like the snow-birds, everywhere on the crust of the snow, and bringing all sorts of crumbs of knowledge as usual—ran in with an eager face. "Poppa" said there was a steamer coming down the channel from up the river, but she was stuck. She was just coming in sight and was drifting with the ice.

Then she was off again, and all who could go were gathering wraps, and cloaks and boots and canes for a scramble to some spot from whence they could see her. Miss Hilson elected to keep Milly company at home, although Albert in his excitement begged Miss Milly to let him carry her to the top of the hotel porch, where the whole scene was visible. But she refused, the red flush on her cheek and the blaze in her bright young eyes alone telling of the youthful longing and regret at the deprivation.

Miss Hilson noted both, and she lent herself to such interesting subjects and such vivacious descriptions that she made the hour delightful, and almost brought Milly to an unguarded reference to Tom Netterley's troubled fortunes and mysterious disappearance, which effectually steadied her nerves into watchfulness and left her no room for regrets. The others came trooping in, chilled to the bone but enthusiastic.

"You ought to see her, Milly! She doesn't look anything like the size she is, and she is so helpless and forlorn."

"For all the world like a wounded—something. A living thing, you know, that you have to pity."

"She is pretty well over on her side. It really looks dangerous, although I suppose the ice is solid enough for the men on her to come ashore."

"Oh, I wonder if there are any women! Annie went to ask her father, but he moved off with the other men before she reached him. Oh, Milly, the coloring of earth and sky to-day is perfect. You never saw such blue and white! It is dazzling."

"Our Lady's earth," said Helena, softly. "Cold and cruel as the wind is, do you know that very blue and white seemed to me to speak of safety for all, and comfort and joy? It is as though through all things her mantle is over us, and her supplicating eyes pleading for the homeless and the poor, and those in peril as they may be on that steamer. It is really not a blue and white day to pass carelessly or forget. It is a heavenly day, and I wish Milly could see it out under the sky."

Annie and Leila had come in with the home party, and now slipped noiselessly away as they often went and came. But, lo! in a few minutes they were back with "Poppa" and "Grandfather," and another strong and tall sailor who was "Grandfather's" only surviving son.

"Now, Miss Helena, she can see it out under the sky! Poppa and Uncle Sam here can carry her lady-a-London just as easy!"

"And grandfather says you ought to see it, Miss Milly, 'cause it only comes once in a lifetime."

"That's so, ladies. I never see it afore in my life, and I have been here over sixty years. You'd better bundle up, Miss Milly, and take it while it comes. It's a sight worth seeing."

There was a little demurring, for Milly was "a plump little partridge" now, but the kindness that prompted the offer, the pleasant, strong faces that smiled at her, and her own keen longing, carried the day. They took her up easily, and with grandfather to guide, with Annie and Leila as guards of honor, and with Helena and Frank as an escort, and Albert as a follower, they went forth again.

Milly never forgot that sight. They carried her up a steep rampart of the now sand-strewn ice masses, and held her as long as she wished, turning her to this point of view and to that peculiarity worth noting, and calling attention in their seaman like way to the steamer's position, her danger, her possibilities of a speedy release, and her probabilities of a long imprisonment.

Then they bore her home in triumph, the richer for her life by the beauty they had added to that life by their strength of arm and their warmth of heart.

"She's as good as gold!" said grandfather, after they had left her. "And she gives our children every day what gold couldn't buy 'em. She's like a good elder sister to 'em, and they follow her like lambs."

"That's so," emphasized "Poppa," for he heard all Milly's virtues day after day, and saw Annie growing up to them with loving appreciation. "She gives us the best she has and no mistake."

CHAPTER XVIII.

OUT OF BONDAGE.

MILLY could not sleep that night. She had not been out of the house for several days, and she missed the open air in which she had almost lived for months, while the unexpected novelty of her short excursion had stirred her blood to racing speed by its chill and its new sensations. She tried to lie perfectly still, but, at last, she had to awaken Helena and beg to get into her chair and have the lamp turned high for reading.

"I have tried my best, but indeed, it gets worse and worse. I hear noises and I see sights. It's too bad, Helena, but it is only the second time since we came down. I hope you won't mind!"

"Oh, Milly dear, you ought to know I don't mind. Let me start this fire a little, and tuck you up comfortably, and put your books where you can reach them, and in five minutes I shall be sound asleep again."

In five minutes or very little more time, Milly was as much alone as ever, for Helena was indeed asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow. But it was quite a different thing in the wheeled chair, where a touch could send her to the window, or incline the back at any angle. She had several new books, too, and she was soon quite easy and ready to scold herself for the nervousness that had found the night so long and almost horrible.

The moon was up to-night, and the light on sea and

land was white as daylight. The steamer had moved a little with the ice, and lay within sight of her window, but far off and shadowy. She seemed to have turned a little, and stood upright instead of on her side as she had appeared the day before. This was one of the changes they had foretold for her, and they had assured her she was not in danger. But, oh ! how cold it looked !

She sat there a long time, watching it and thinking of all she had heard of ice-bound ships, of her father so far from her, and while in a southern clime, nearer the awful untracked wilderness of the Antarctic than any one she had ever known before he went there. The forests of Brazil and the icebergs of the Antarctic, the fires of Hecla and her own scented lilies which she must protect to-morrow, the polar bears and Albert in a skin coat,—these and more fancies were chasing each other through her brain when she suddenly awoke from a half slumber before the window as she had awakened at Bay Bluff. Of course, it was that which recalled Tom Netterley instantly to her mind, and she seemed to see him coming rapidly to her over the ice hummocks as if running at full speed.

But there was some one on the ice, surely. Something black and living, slipping and falling as she could see in the bright moonlight, up again and struggling on, falling and *not* reappearing, then, in sight and nearer. Who or what could it be ? It must be some one from the steamer, and he must need help. Oh, what could she do ?

"Helena ! Helena ! Wake up and come here, won't you ? There is something the matter somewhere ! There is a man on the ice ! Indeed, there is !"

"Does he want me ?" gasped Helena, trying to wake

up. "Hadn't Albert better go? Why, what did you say? Are you sick? Do you want ice?"

"No, no—not I at all! There's a man—see him run! He is ashore now—he is coming here! Oh, call your mother—she will know."

Whoever it was had indeed reached the shore and was coming very waveringly and unsteadily up the partially broken avenue from the beach to the side of their house. The snow was most uncertain walking, and he seemed lame or hurt, and, to add to their fright, as soon as he rose against the spotless white of the snow, a sharp report broke on the frosty night, and a little puff of flame issued from the dark side of the steamer.

"Oh, what was that for! Who can it be! Helena, do call your mother!"

Milly was trembling in every fiber. All the impossible and unheard-of things in the world rushed upon her without rhyme or reason. Pirates, escaping slaves, a fleeing murderer caught in time—what and who was it flying desperately to Ocean Cottage? And dare Ocean Cottage take him in?

Helena ran into her mother's room, but Milly sat with clasped hands and dilated eyes. The man or boy, for he was slight and tall like a boy as she could easily see now—pushed steadily on the little distance left, and came close under her window. There he stopped, and through the glass she heard him say, feebly and shrilly, holding out his hands and looking up at her:

"Miss Milly! let me in for pity's sake! Oh! let me in, please."

"It's Tom Netterley!" she cried, sweeping away from

the window on her wheels and driving the chair into the hall. "Oh, Mrs. Marsden—Frank—Albert—somebody open the door and let him in!"

The next moment they issued from the door in a group and helped the almost exhausted boy into the hall.

"He is safe, Milly," called Mrs. Marsden, "and you shall hear all about it as soon as possible. There is nothing the matter with him but fatigue. We will take care of him."

Milly immediately "took herself in hand," and shut the door between her and the interesting bustle she could not share. But the questions she asked and could not answer were more than she could count when she reflected.

Tom, in the meanwhile, was telling a very straight story, and showing a good deal of manly straightforwardness. The struggle through the rough and rather dangerous ice hummocks had strained and tired him, but his had not been an easy life and he was toughened.

"I'm all right now, thank you, ma'am," he said, when the fire and the cordial and the comfortable seat had given him breath and started the blood to coursing comfortably through his veins instead of racing and throbbing as it had done. "You see, there's nothing to be afraid of now I am once fairly among people. They didn't intend to let me off, but they'll make no fuss now."

He addressed his remarks to Mrs. Marsden, as if with a thorough understanding between them, and she accepted the position.

"Your father?" she asked in a low voice, as the others moved about in the confusion of such a sudden and unexpected midnight raid upon their quiet.

"Dead!" he answered in the same tone. "Three weeks ago. He never got over the moving, but I was with him and he was comfortable at the last."

"Did you really come from the steamer?" asked Frank. "Is it in danger?"

"No, it's moving down the channel, and has righted itself. Pretty tight fix, but they're not afraid. It was a chance for me, though, and I knew it would be the only one in this country. And I didn't want to go to another."

Mrs. Marsden saw the girls look at each other in blank astonishment, as if doubtful of his sanity.

"Miss Aveling kept your secret," she said, "and you will have to tell your story from the very beginning—or, as much as you can tell. But not to-night. A good sleep will do you good, and you must feel that you are safe in Gray Beach. Will you have anything to eat? Or anything we can get, in fact?"

No, he was not hungry, and he wanted nothing. No use of going to any trouble, for he would just lie down on the floor there, and be "all right" in a minute.

"She don't know anything much about the children, I reckon?" he said wistfully as they were leaving, and he looked to Mrs. Marsden for an answer.

"Not much, except that they have been well and running about as usual. You know we have had very curious weather for Gray Beach, and have not seen as much of each other as usual since the snow-storm came."

He brightened a little even at that, and they left him smiling on his improvised pillow, with the firelight and the home coziness around him.

"There is something most attractive in that boy's face," said Mrs. Marsden as she repeated what he had said to Milly, "and I cannot but feel his ambition will result in better things for him, at least. What a lonely, sad life he has had! You feel it when you see him."

"I am so glad he is here once more!" exclaimed Milly. "I am sure he will have a story to tell. I hope he will tell it to Father Morgan, and then he can be helped in real earnest."

"Well, we have only to wait for the morning. Now go to sleep if you can. But Helena can arrange you much more comfortably than I can, and here she is, ready for bed."

"I was only telling Miss Hilson what the noise meant. It had wakened her. She thought of her box the first thing. I had forgotten all about it. But, as she says, it wasn't Tom Netterley took it or he would never have come back when he had such a chance to get off."

"No, indeed! Good night, both of you, and don't talk. You might wake others, and it will certainly excite Milly."

They obeyed. But after a silence of several minutes, Milly softly broke it:

"Are you asleep, Helena?"

"No, nor sleepy. I had a complete waking up that time."

"I must tell you something, and then I shall be as still as your mother could wish. While you were all downstairs, I moved my right foot."

"Oh, Milly!"

Helena sat up immediately, wondering and delighted.

"Yes, I really did. I did not mean to do it—did not think of it, but I was so anxious and it seemed so hard not to be where you all were, hearing and seeing, and the first thing I knew, I lifted it as if I was going to step off the foot-board. But I cannot do it again."

"Oh, but you will! That means so much, Milly. It means that the power is there. It has only to come back as it went."

"Well, it does prove that I am really better. I begin to have a little, little bit of hope, Helena. But I must try not to think of it. It must be——"

"As God wills," she had almost said. But Milly had a reverent shyness that kept her silent on such thoughts. Helena understood her, though.

After all, the girls soon slept and slept late. They were not down to the breakfast the others made quite lively for Tom, and at which he told his story. But they heard it all afterwards, when he had gone to look up his brothers, and make known to the village that he was back among them. He spoke naturally and cheerfully of making this announcement, but it was evident he shrank from it. A word or two made known the wound of their suspicions as to Miss Hilson's box. Mrs. Marsden went with him to the door alone.

"Tom, if I were you, I would go first to Father Morgan. You sent him a message by Miss Aveling, and he responded to it as soon as he could—in less than twenty-four hours. He was too late, but it was not his fault. Go to him and find a friend. He may be of the greatest help to you, and if he can, he will."

Tom stood a moment.

"I know you're right," he said, decidedly. "I'll go."

Mrs. Marsden turned back to the dining-room, and found the two sleepers just arrived, full of eager curiosity. Frank could enlighten them.

"He says you know all about his going away, Milly—that he saw you the day you and Helena went for the blue berry tree up at Bay Bluff. You kept his secret well, I'm sure, through all that fuss about him."

"I had to keep it," said Milly, "I promised I would tell Father Morgan first, and then tell only the ones he thought best. And Father Morgan said to tell your mother. But it was very hard not to tell Miss Hilson. I knew she would be glad to hear from poor Tom, and she would believe he did not take the box."

"Indeed, I should!" said Miss Hilson, who was an interested listener, finding the life at Ocean Cottage very different from that of the Stormy Petrel's Nest, and as agreeable in its way. "But we quite forgot to connect him with the box while listening to him this morning. I think he forgot it, too."

"No," said Frank, "he did not forget. I could see that several times. But he waited to have something more to tell, I think."

"And are you going to keep us waiting until then to hear what he did tell."

"I am only paying you up for your stinginess towards us, Miss Milly. To think you had an adventure and cheated us out of the fun!"

"You don't owe me anything," said Helena. "I am sure I was right there and missed it."

"So you were. You deserve to hear all at once, and

Milly need not shut her ears this time. Tom tells a very good story, don't he, Miss Hilson ? "

Miss Hilson assented, and between them she and Frank re-told it.

The alarm had come to the house at Bay Bluff the very evening Milly had seen Tom, some of the gang hearing in a country store somewhere in the neighborhood that " Gray Beach intended to clean out that place the next day." Everything was hurriedly put in order for flight, and although he entreated them to leave him, for he would be better in jail than out of it, they made Tom's father go with them, and Tom, as a matter of course, would not have left him if they would have permitted it. They wrapped the sick man in all the wraps they could muster, and put him as carefully as possible into one of the boats, put a lot of stuff from the cellar and stable into the other boat, and left, at daydawn, for " up the river." Familiar with every foot of the way, and with some sort of link everywhere with the outlaw class that may be found in twos or threes everywhere, they had slowly made their way to the city and into a hiding-place in its heart. There his father had been worse than ever and had died about three weeks before. After his death, the gang had fastened at once on Tom, and given him to understand he could not leave them until they were ready to part with him. They had treated him fairly well, but he had been a prisoner in effect, and, finally, had been taken on board the steamer in ignorance of his destination. Once well down the river —a slow passage being forced upon them by the ice in the river—they had told him frankly that they were off on a cruise of their own, having obtained the vessel and

meaning to keep it until they had made their fortunes. The first place they made port he was welcome to leave them, if he would swear to "keep his mouth shut." Bringing him with them was only a precaution, as he was too "white-livered a coward," they knew, to ever be one of them.

"I agreed to that," said Tom, "and they let me alone after that. The weather got worse and worse, and we found we couldn't get out, and there was some talk of giving the old boat—she wasn't worth much to begin with, and the ice didn't improve matters—the slip, but they have a good deal of stuff on board of her. I just watched my chance, though, and last night when the tide turned and the wind fell, I knew the break-up would come, and I left. It was a tough walk, but I made it. I steered for the light in the window, but I didn't expect to see her there the first thing. But it gave me courage. I knew she'd help me, for I have heard enough of her to be sure of that. I was not afraid, but I was used up, and The Point was too far off. Any of the folks would have taken me in, even if they had to send for the constable for me next morning. They're all real good down here. But I am glad it happened just as it did, and I am more than thankful to you for what you have done for me."

"That's his story," said Frank, "and he did thank mother very nicely. He said he must be off to the boys, and he didn't suppose they would be very glad to see him; they never liked him to interfere with them, and he always had to keep them out of mischief. But we didn't dare tell him the truth about them. Albert, have you seen the Netterleys anywhere? Are they still away?"

"Fur all I know, dey is, Miss Frank. Mr. Folsom, he say he bet dey down yander or up yander at dat ole Bay Bluff house, kinder sto'm stayed. Dey dess like nothin' better dan some sich foolishness, an' dat Fred, he order 'em roun' heap wuss dan Torm eber dun. Fred Netterley, he mos' a scand'lous ornery feller."

"Well, Albert, you used to be rather severe on Tom. Perhaps you had better give Fred a little more grace," said Mrs. Marsden as they separated for the usual morning tasks.

Milly rolled her chair into the window. She was thinking of the night before when she moved her foot. The thrill of astonishment and awe that she felt at first she could not forget. She did not think of it at the time, but an instant afterwards it flashed upon her. She tried again, but in vain. She was trying all the time, in fact, without result. But hope was there.

"Out of bondage!" she whispered as if to cheer herself with the sound. "It would be that indeed. But Tom's bondage was worse than mine, and he waited and watched for freedom. Why, girls, the steamer is gone!"

Sure enough, she was steaming away almost out of sight where the blue waters widened to the horizon.

"Thank God!" said Mrs. Marsden. "That poor fellow is out of bondage!"

The words fell on Milly's ears like a good omen. At any rate, it was not wrong to hope.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOST.

When Tom Netterley turned away from Mrs. Marsden, and started up the street, it seemed to him that no greater change had ever taken place in a boy's life or in a boy himself than that which had come to him since he was last in Gray Beach. He looked around him to see if it was possible to bring back the old feeling, but the very fields and trees which he had known for so long looked so different in the winter dress, that they seemed to have moved from their old places and stood differently under the winter sun. Then, too, the errand he was on—going to visit the priest. Many a time he had watched the good man pacing to and fro on his sunny porch, book in hand, and half wished he dare go to him and ask what he ought to do in some boyish perplexity under the weight of cares and duties that were too much for a boy. But it had never occurred to him that the day would come when Tom Netterley would walk bravely up to the stranger, with a story to tell such as his, and the confidence in the priest and in himself that comforted him with the thought of a successful future. And, now, that time had arrived, and it seemed not at all a strange proceeding.

Tom had learned a great deal in the three months he had spent away from Gray Beach. He had seen a good

deal of "life" that he did not like and that he watched with the firm intention of taking warning and avoiding everything which belonged to it, but he had also seen that there were more people in the world than he had ever conceived possible, and that they were not all either poor and rudely brought up, or rich and lazy and foolish as he had always thought the summer guests. The narrow round of a man's existence at Gray Beach had once been all he knew. That ignorance was gone forever, and he could never again be content with it. He now believed that the way was open for all the Netterleys to work their way up, and he would go again as soon as he could, but the others should go with him. It would be hard work, but they should try it, at all events. He would push them out of the wretched home nest—how wretched he knew now—and they should "scratch for themselves," as he crossed a place in the snow where crumbs had been tossed from a friendly door to the little birds whose tiny tracks suggested this thought.

The paths around the priest's cottage were all swept clean, and he was on the porch in the sun, walking to and fro, as Tom remembered to have seen him so often, but without his book. He stopped as Tom lifted the latch of the gate, and waited with kindly welcome in his eye at the low step. Tom mentioned his name, and then the welcome extended to lip and hand. He was led into the simple, cheerful room, and told his story with all the help of interested question and sympathetic comment.

Tom was so direct a fellow that it did not take long. His father's death, the principal events of the time he passed as a carefully watched "ward" of his father's as-

sociates, the trip down the river and the bay, and his escape, were all naturally told as well as his wishes and purposes now. Father Morgan approved of these, and readily promised to help him, for Tom asked little help—he only wanted to find if his plans looked possible or sensible to another, older, wiser, and more experienced than any one with whom he had ever talked.

"I am very much obliged to you," he said at the end of an hour, as he rose to leave, "and I shall do as you advise. I shall find the boys, and talk to them, and see what choice they make, and then tell the people who have helped us before this. There shall be no sneaking away this time. I'm sorry I went off that way before, but it seemed it was the only way then. And if I hadn't, I would not have found father. I don't think," he said, pausing and looking earnestly into Father Morgan's face, "that I had better tell them about father now."

"No!" said Father Morgan, quickly. "No, not now. But when they are older, and things are different with you and with them, tell them then, my boy. Let them know it all, with its bitter lessons and its showing of the leading of the hand of Almighty God. You were certainly brought to him in his hour of need, and sad as was his end, it had all the solace possible to him in the presence of a good son. But, as you say, I would not tell them now."

Father Morgan stood at the door watching the boy as he went down the path through the woods that took him home without passing through the village. "If they have any of his nature in them, they will see more than that in the history of their father's last days—they will see an example of unselfish devotion to duty that many a

man better taught and trained than that poor fellow has never thought of in far less cruel trials. He is a fine fellow, and I think he'll do well now. I think it can be managed to interest those who can push a deserving and ambitious boy even better than a poor old country priest, with all the good wishes in the world."

Meanwhile, Tom had hurried along the softened path—for the cold was much moderated and the snow was melting fast—with a confused idea of what would occur when he found the boys. He was not in the least prepared for what was really the end of his rapid walk—a deserted home and utter disappointment. At first, he thought they were out as usual, and had left the house as they had always done without fear of a visitor during their absence. But when he found that the door would not open, and when a search in all possible hiding-places did not reveal the rusty key so seldom used "in the old times," he began to notice other signs that this was no ordinary absence, and a sense of loneliness and desolation crept over him. What could have happened? For the first time, he realized that three months even at Gray Beach might work changes in other lives than his own.

He turned, then, to the village, for he would not go to the nearest neighbors, the "P'inters." More than one pair of little feet scurried indoors to tell "Mommy" that Tom Netterley was home again, and more than one excited face peeped from behind the scanty curtains as he hurried by, but he looked neither to the right nor left until he opened the door of Mr. Folsom's store and stepped in, where the usual party of winter loungers crowded around the stove.

All heads were turned towards him, for two young fellows of his own age who had been close to the glass doors of the store as he approached, had stepped back with the astonished exclamation :

"Here comes Tom Netterley !"

Mr. Folsom was just coming from the room in the rear, and his was the only voice of greeting of any kind.

"Well, Tom Netterley, you are a stranger ! Never expected to set eyes on you again in Gray Beach."

"I don't know any reason why, Mr. Folsom. I left Gray Beach as many another fellow has left it—owing more than I could pay, but willing to pay if I could ; and I have come back to it as some of them never come before I start in to earn a better living than I could make here. What I want to know is—where are the boys ?"

"Well, more than you don't know that. They've been gone since before Christmas. They left about as you did, all five of them."

Tom was thunderstruck.

"Mr. Folsom, you don't mean that ! But somebody knows—don't they ?" turning to the group around the stove. "Jim Merton, you used to run with Fred. Didn't you hear him say where he meant to go ?"

"Never heard him say nothing about it. I hadn't much to do with Fred out of gunnin' season."

No one else spoke, and Tom began to feel the coldness of his reception, and the listlessness which spoke so plainly the "wuthlessness" of the Netterleys in the eyes of the community.

"Well, this is rather an upset." He tried to say it coolly, but his voice showed his feeling. "I haven't heard

from here since I left, but I expected they'd wait for me. They knew——" he paused. He could not say "they knew I would be back," for this departure proved that they had not that faith in him he had counted on. It was an unlucky break in his speech, for every one in the store filled it in his own fashion with words that confirmed their suspicion that Tom had gone off with Miss Hilson's box, and that the others knew all about it.

Some of the little boys had straggled in, scenting an excitement, and stood, with open eyes and mouths, gazing steadily into Tom's face.

"Here, Donny! You used to be about with them. Didn't August and Louis tell you where they were going?"

Donny hung his head and put his finger in his mouth. He was a very little boy, but one a size larger came in with:

"Louis didn't tell me nothin', but he told Alissa somethin', and she told me."

"What was it?"

"She say he told her he was a-goin' to live over yan way towards Bay Bluff—that he was a-goin' to have a new father an' mother, an' their name wasn't Netterley. She say he told her that one night, and the next mornin'—why, he was gone."

"When was that?"

But this was beyond the computation of the young man. It was some time before Christmas, and no date more definite could be obtained from him. But comparison and calculation of an intricate nature led up to the conclusion among the elders that it must have been the last week

before Christmas, or about the twenty-third or twenty-fourth of December.

"Hello!" said a heavy-looking old man, who had listened as a stranger listens to all that is said. "Now you're talkin'! I guess I kin tell somethin' about that Louis fellow. He was about right, I guess. Ole man Dallas and his wife, over our way, they brought home a little fellow 'bout that time, 'stead of a little boy of their own. He was a sickly little chap—theirs was—and he died two, three year ago. They've been a-wantin' another ever since, and my wife was a-tellin' me they got one. A little chap with real putty eyes and kinder red hair, she say. She see him over there when he come."

"That's Louis!" said Mr. Folsom. "Anybody seein' Louis will see that red hair the first thing. He'd be a mighty putty boy if it wasn't fur that."

"Their boy had red hair," quietly remarked the stranger. Tom had started up and drawn near to him.

"Where did you say they lived?" he asked eagerly.

"Over Bay Bluff way—over to Dallas's farm. Anybody can tell you when you get to Hanstown on the Bay Bluff road."

"Tom, you ain't goin' right off, are you? You haven't given us any account of yourself. Hold up, there!"

But Tom had opened the door and started at a racing pace before Mr. Folsom finished.

"He ought to bin arrested," said some one, reproachfully.

"Then why didn't you arrest him," snapped some one else.

"Why, I didn't think of it, else I would."

"That's what I was thinkin' when I hollered to him," said Mr. Folsom, "but he kept straight on a-goin'."

"And no wonder!" commented the stranger, with something nearly a laugh. "I guess I'm 'bout thawed out now, and I'll be movin'. Good-day, friends!"

He climbed into a rickety old wagon which stood at the door, and his old horse moved off, slowly at first, but soon warming to a good round trot. It was not long before he caught up with Tom and cordially invited him to ride. Tom asked him to stop for a minute at the priest's house when they reached it, and he was little more than a minute telling what he had heard and what he hoped to find. Then, climbing up beside his good-natured acquaintance, he started for the third time in search of "the boys."

CHAPTER XX.

FOUND.

The conversation during that drive was one-sided. Tom could not talk. He was anxious, of course, and there was such uncertainty attending the outcome of this expedition, for the red haired-boy might not be Louis. Then, too, he felt the reception he had met. The Marsden family and their kindness, seconded by the cordiality of the stranger, Father Morgan, had put him into a new world and had caused him to forget the reasons his older neighbors had for less hopeful remembrance of the Tom Netterley who had left them. Now, all returned to him most depressingly, and he had to fight hard with himself to continue to hope.

But it was a good thing for him that he was not allowed to sink back into the old life at all. Perhaps, if he had found them where he left them, he and the boys might have drifted into a waiting and enervating spirit very difficult, if not impossible, to shake off. As it was, in doubt and discouragement he had to struggle, and struggling will wake up the energies and kindle the spirit in any man not dying of old age or shame.

The horse was a good traveler and he kept time to the chatter of his owner in such style that he had not quite exhausted all his round-about questions before they reached

the road leading into the home of Farmer Dallas, as he called his neighbor. Tom afterwards found out that this was because the neighbor was an Englishman, and had brought his title of "Farmer" with him, using it in this country until he came to be known by it generally. He had been here now a good many years, and had gathered a great deal around his home, empty to him and his wife, however, without the voices and footsteps of their children. The last of these was the little boy who had died "two, three year ago," and whose place they had given to some lonely child. Could it be his Louis? Tom asked the question over and over as he walked down the long lane which led to the house from the main road to Bay Bluff and Brighton-on-the-Sea.

The house was an old one, painted red, and with a worn, crooked roof, but it looked very clean and pleasant, or, rather, homelike. There were many small buildings scattered irregularly around it, and a garden. At the end of the lane which continued beyond the house, Tom saw the waters of the bay, black and sullen against the white shore line and the deep blue winter sky. He knew he was not far from Bay Bluff, but he did not glance in that direction. One more visit he must make there, and he was sorry for it. He would have been glad never to see it again.

A dog ran out at him with a shrill bark, but when he stopped and spoke, soon dropped its defiant manner, and crept to his feet, wriggling and twisting and wagging its tail in the most friendly manner. A woman opened the door and came out on the long porch, which had a corner enclosed with glass sashes, showing a mass of color and green leaves most cheerful and inviting. She spoke with

a soft English voice, and she had a sweet, sad face, that reminded Tom of his memory of his mother.

"He won't hurt you, sir," she said; "he's nothing but a puppy, and he makes a sad lot of noise without meaning anything that is harmful. Be done, Rover! Be done, I say! Would you please to walk in?"

"If it might only be Louis!" thought Tom. "I could not do better than leave him here. This is a home for him, poor little fellow. He never had one since he was born."

By this time—you can think a great deal in a flash of time—Tom had reached the porch, where the woman stood looking at him with kindly eyes.

"I heard you had a strange little boy here," said Tom. "It is most likely all a mistake, but I am looking for my little brother, and I thought I would come to ask you."

"It is not a mistake that we have a little boy here and that he was a stranger to us until a short while since. But—your little brother? May I ask the name?"

"His name is Louis Netterley. I am his brother Tom."

"Yes, the little boy is Louis Netterley. We thought we should call him by our own name—poor little fellow!"

Her eyes filled with tears, and she looked at Tom pityingly.

"Is there anything the matter? Has he gone from here?" asked Tom, quickly.

"No, lad, no! But he is very, very ill. I doubt the child took his sickness before he came to us, for he seems to have been sadly neglected. He has pneumonia now, and badly."

There was mild reproach in her look as she spoke of

neglect, and Tom hastened to say that he had been away from home on business for three months and more, that Louis had always been his especial charge and that he would never have left him if he could have helped it. And then he stumbled in his speech for he suddenly remembered that he did leave him, intentionally.

"I came back yesterday," he said, "and I heard only this morning of your adoption of a boy. If it had not been that a neighbor of yours was in the store at Gray Beach and heard me asking the children questions, I might have looked a long time for the little fellow. How did you come to get him?" with a sudden thought of Fred and the others, whom he had forgotten in his anxiety for Louis.

"A young fellow, much about your age, came here one day, and asked my husband and me if it were true we wanted a little boy to keep us from loneliness without our own little son who died," she said. "We told him it was true—that we had wanted it for some time. Then he told us he had a little brother, that he must go where he could get work for himself and two other brothers, but that he did not know what to do with the youngest and the one next him. He told us who he was, and said he would bring the little boys to see us. We chose the youngest, for he is like our own little son."

"He told you a true enough story," said Tom. "It was to look for a better living for us I went away, but I did not think Fred would be driven to it before I got back. Well, I'm sure I am thankful Louis found such a home in his want of a caretaker. Let me see him, won't you? The little fellow has been like my own baby always."

The gentle mother-heart was in the look she gave the

boy who was so old and so young at the same time. Then she led the way into the house and up-stairs to a warm, sunny room, where there was every comfort around the poor little sick boy. Tom scarcely recognized his baby in the thin, large-eyed, white-robed sufferer among the pillows. His hair had been cut short, and the tiny red-gold rings hardly rose above the white forehead. But he knew Tom, and a flitting gleam of glad surprise was the first greeting Tom had that was his very own.

"Oh, Tom!" the weak lips formed rather than uttered.

"He's been a very sick boy," said the woman, laying a tender hand on his head, "but he is better now. Please God, he shall be quite well again before the snow is all gone."

He smiled at her fondly, but closed his eyes again as though too weary to open them. Another woman who had been sitting at her sewing near him rose and went out.

Tom watched her with a secret fear that Louis must be dying, and she was going to summon some one who ought to see him die—Mr. Dallas, he supposed. But, instead of this, she came in presently with a cup of steaming broth, which she put on the table near the bed, and began to prepare Louis to take it from a spoon, in very small mouthfuls, very carefully administered.

"John is down-stairs," she said to Mrs. Dallas, as soon as she was fairly started on her good work, and Mrs. Dallas signed to Tom to follow her out of the room. She led the way down-stairs, and into the room where her husband was waiting for her. He asked first for the sick child, and then she told him who Tom was. Tom followed with as much of his story as he felt it right to tell a

stranger who had not intimated in any way that he cared to hear it, or that he wished to help him in any way. Mr. Dallas knew more than his wife of their adopted boy's past, for he had made all the inquiries possible, and had heard a great deal and met with many who pitied him and Mrs. Dallas for undertaking the task of bringing up "one of them Netterleys." But he had also heard a great deal of Tom's care of the little ones, and of the weight of the whole family that had pressed heavily on him. Indeed, it was what he had heard of Tom from the first that had inclined him to Fred's proposition regarding the boys, for he believed Fred to be Tom and Fred did not undeceive him. Now that he saw the real Tom, he liked what he did see. Besides, they had had Louis with them now long enough to get acquainted with him, and to find out in his illness and its attendant nursing little traits and loving ways that attracted them to him. So, in the end, Tom was cordially invited to stay with them a day or two, until the change in Louis might be more decided. And Tom accepted the invitation, going at once into the sick-room, and relieving the others at the same time it relieved his own full heart to care for the only one left to him.

Of the others, he could learn nothing. Mr. Dallas said that Fred brought the two younger boys there for Mrs. Dallas to see them, and that he went at once in the direction of Brighton, with some intimation of taking the train for the city that same day, as soon as she decided in favor of Louis. Louis had not fretted any for the brothers, nor spoken of them except when questioned, and had, in fact, been far from well even then. Since his illness, they had been solely occupied with taking care of him.

"It makes us feel very much drawn to the boy," he said, "for we had a weary time of nursing our own boy in that room there. And now, it almost seems that it's his face we see looking up at us from the pillows, as if he waited for us to help him all we could."

Long, long hours were those Tom sat beside the quiet bed, and thought after thought pressed close upon each other through his tired brain. Fred and August were evidently together, but no one had a word to say of Dan and Carroll, and Dan could never get on with Fred. Had they gone with him, or, as was far more likely from his knowledge of them, had they struck off on an independent venture? All he could do was be thankful that he had found one, and that he was allowed to try to keep him a little longer.

That day and night there was no change. Louis lay motionless and weary, apparently, taking what they gave him, and dropping off to sleep again the instant the spoon was returned to the cup. But the next morning, he awoke refreshed, and each time they spoke to him, the awaking was more perceptible and the improvement more encouraging. That night—the second night—in the middle of it, Tom was giving him his broth when he whispered, softly, and as though he feared to be overheard:

"Did Dan tell you? Did he come?"

Tom thought he was dreaming or "flighty," but later on, there was something else about Dan, and again the next morning, so that gradually Tom began to hope that it was only waiting until Louis was able to speak; then he would know all.

And he did. The first opportunity Louis had to speak

with him alone after he was really better, he told him that Dan and Carroll "had hired out" to different farmers not so very far away. It was Dan's plan, and was in opposition to Fred's, for he said he was sure Tom would come back looking for them, and he would not go out of the country until he did come.

"So he coaxed me and August to come here, and to stay here, and he promised he would come and see us. Fred said he was goin' to leave us both here, but they wouldn't keep August. It's nice here." He finished feebly. "An' Carroll, he went first."

It was a disjointed and unsatisfactory account, but Tom felt its value. He could wait in patience a little while longer, and then look up Dan and Carroll. His heart was lighter than he had ever known it, for there were evidences that his boys could do for themselves, after all. And he began to hope that Louis was provided for, and safe while he was fighting for him. These were good people, and they would do well by the little motherless child.

Tom was fully occupied with caring for Louis for several days, but at last he felt at liberty to dispose of his time for part of a day, and he faced again the unpleasant task of visiting Bay Bluff. After dinner, he asked Mrs. Dallas if she "would be able to sit with Louis that time in the day," and she answered heartily that she was just about to ask him if he did not want to go out for the air, because she could take his place. She told him to go, and not to think of coming home until he was tired, for she had no doubt he could find enough to keep him out that long, if it was in the country, and not near the village.

It was about two o'clock when he paused on the top of a slight rise in the ground to deliberate which path he would best take to reach Bay Bluff in the shortest time. He wanted to be well rid of his task before dark, and the afternoons were short. Having decided, and taken "the lay of the land," as they say at Gray Beach, he started across the country at a long running pace which carried him quickly over the ground.

He found the house in much worse condition than when they left it. The whole country had turned out after that, and it had been searched, and searched so thoroughly that doors and window shutters had been carried off to stand the test of ax, and hammer, and fire, before they could be believed incapable of hiding a burglar or a tramp. At first, he feared his visit would be in vain and that he might be forever branded in some minds as the thief who stole Miss Hilson's silver box. But a little later he was relieved. The cellar had only stood a nominal search. The wine cellar had been torn out, and the strong bars which had formed its partition from the outer cellar lay scattered all over the floors of the two compartments, but the large closet within it had not even had the lock forced.

Tom took up one of the bars and applied himself lustily to the forcing process now. The lock was strong, but Tom was determined and the bar was heavy. Two or three hard blows, then a little prying and lifting, and it yielded. The door flew open.

The sun was just near enough the horizon to send a broad ray of light through the window of the outer cellar in at the door of the closet. It was empty, and Tom for a

moment felt his heart sink. But he suddenly recalled a murmur he had heard and never understood—something about "heavier than sand" and "no stone there" and "a pickax'll do it—safe enough without one." He picked up the bar he had cast aside and thrust it into the earth. The box was there.

They had covered it hastily with a few inches of dirt, fearing that any day the house might be searched, and this, the biggest prize they had secured, be taken from them. But in their hurried flight they had forgotten it, or, rather, one having reminded the other of it and then been sent to some other task, each had supposed some one else was getting the box. After they had pushed off, and dared not risk returning, they had discovered that it had not been brought from the cellar, and quarreled then and often afterwards over the loss. It was during these quarrels Tom had heard enough to be sure that his suspicions were correct and that the box was in the wine cellar closet.

The light, dry earth lay easily over it, and he soon had it uncovered. It was rather an awkward size to carry, and he was not ready to start with it that day for the long walk to Gray Beach. He studied the problem awhile, and then concluded it would be best to leave it where it was, and in a day or so borrow something, if it was nothing more than a wheelbarrow, and carry it direct to Miss Hilson.

It was almost dark and he was quite tired enough to go home when he had secured the closet door once more, and started off across the fields to Louis. The little fellow was so much better and brighter that he welcomed his

entrance into the room with a feeble attempt at a shout, and afterwards spent quite a merry quarter of an hour telling over the stories Mrs. Dallas had been telling him of the way boys were boys in her own dear land—a sea-coast village of England having been her native place.

The next day Dan turned up. The news of Louis' illness had reached him, and he had obtained leave to go to ask for him. He met Tom in his own stolid way, questioned him neither as to the past nor the future, but said he was well and well satisfied—that work was no harder than some kinds of play, and that he was paid for the work and never had been paid for the play. Carroll was on a farm adjoining the one where he was, and had easier work and less of it.

"So he oughter," he concluded. "He ain't as old as I am and he ain't more'n half as big. But he's a doin' first-rate. You can go and see. Him and me have planned it all out. We're going to work here till we get enough to buy a farm or a ranch or something like that. Then we'll run it. You see if we don't."

Tom, who had grown well acquainted with Mr. Dallas, told him that night of Dan's talk, and laughed a little sadly at the plan. But Mr. Dallas said it was not a bad thing to get such an idea into the head of a boy.

"You see, it will balance him. When the longing to own a tree and a field of turf is once put into a boy's heart, he'll never rest until it's satisfied. That's human nature, and there is no other ambition better for him in the long run. It will fit in with any other he may grow into, for a man may be a priest or a scholar, a tradesman or a farmer, and a bit of land of his own will make him love his God

and his country only that much the more, and give him standing ground on which to hold his own while he does his duty."

"I notice," said Tom after a little, "that you said priest and that you put him first. Are you a Catholic?"

"I am," said the farmer proudly.

"Well, I hoped you were, but I did not know. If you are so kind to Louis as to wish to keep him, I shall be glad and thankful to leave him in Catholic hands. He ought to be a Catholic. Our people used to be—always were, but my father lost it."

"Then, my lad, his father's fathers with their prayers, no doubt, have brought a chance of life eternal into the grasp of you and Louis, at least. You may be sure we shall look on it as a privilege of our own to try and bind him to it so that he may not cast away his faith nor lose it carelessly. Then you are willing to leave him with us?"

"To give him to you as your own. And may he indeed make up to you for the loss of the little son whose place you give him!"

So Louis was provided for and Tom was rapidly rising from the slough of hopelessness that had clogged him now and then all his life.

The next day he borrowed a horse and cart of Mr. Dallas, and went over to Gray Beach to dismantle—if there was anything remaining—the old home. He drove round by Bay Bluff and put the box in the straw with which he had filled the cart and muffled his feet, for it was still cold when exposed to the open air as in driving a cart.

CHAPTER XXI.

SILVER AND ALL.

But that was the end of the bitter weather. The sun came out with strength in every ray, and glory in every beam, and the snow melted away rapidly. The sands are never wet long, and in a few days it was hard to realize that such winter desolation had surrounded them.

Tom Netterley had disappeared again. He had gone home and found it deserted, and after hurried inquiries and saying little of himself had gone off before the villagers could collect their wits enough to secure him. Mrs. Marsden was beginning to feel anxious and disappointed when Father Morgan came down and told them that he had seen the boy, had heard his story, and was quite convinced of his sincerity and earnestness. He had gone directly to Father Morgan as he had promised, and had reappeared for a moment after he had been home.

"Tell them I will be back as soon as I find them or hear anything. They can't be very far away, for they hadn't money enough to travel by rail, and Louis was too small to walk. The folks have an idea they are at Bay Bluff, but I hardly think that. I shall go to see, the first thing."

Father Morgan had been in the city two days, and had

brought the message on his return, finding Tom was still absent. Again there was nothing to do but wait.

Moonlight nights were over, and darkness as absolute as it is at any time so near the sea, when Albert opened the door one night to a rapid, yet light stroke on its oak panels. The sound had reached the group in the library, and all were intent on the disclosure of its meaning when Albert ushered in with great ceremony and his most solemn dignity, "Mr. Netterley fo' de ladies."

It was Tom, careworn and weary looking, and bearing a small, strong box. Miss Hilson sprang forward with outstretched hands.

"Oh, my box!" she cried. "Where did you get it?"

"Out at Bay Bluff, didn't you?" cried Milly.

He put it carefully at Miss Hilson's feet and stood up with a sigh of relief. "I never had such a burden on my mind before, and I hope I may never have another like it. There it is, Miss Hilson, and I think it is all right. I have never seen inside of it, but I don't believe it has been opened since they carried it off. I found it just where I saw it hidden the night they came back with it. It was forgotten in the hurry of the flight."

"Have you found the boys?" asked Mrs. Marsden.

"Yes, after a good bit of trouble, I found them—some of them. Louis is down with the pneumonia, poor little fellow! Fred gave him to a good old couple up near Bay Bluff and I believe they mean to do right by him. Carroll and Dan have hired out and started for themselves. Spunky, wasn't it? Fred and August have gone—no one knows where, and my only comfort is that they will not starve. Fred is a sharp fellow and can do almost

anything in the line of work. I found Louis first, and he told me as well as he could. I have been taking care of him, for the old people were glad to have help. I shall soon be a trained nurse, I think."

It was rather a sickly smile with which he concluded.

Miss Hilson had produced her keys and unlocked the box with nervous fingers. She lifted the inner cover as though she feared to look beneath it, but her eyes brightened and her face cleared in an instant.

"They are all here!" she cried. "They have not been touched—not a single thing. Oh, Tom, you don't know what you have done for me—my mother's silver and my father's war medals!"

He looked at her with softened eyes. He understood it better than she thought, for there was the memory of his own pretty, gentle, loving young mother always keeping him up to such standard of duty as his untrained and dimly groping conscience had set up for him. Miss Hilson saw the softened glance and registered a vow to help Tom Netterley with more energy and earnestness than she had ever proposed to herself.

"But come and look at the wonderful box you have heard so much of this last few months. It is scarcely worth all the trouble it has made, but no woman wants to lose such things as these. They are really very old and very beautiful."

One by one she lifted them out of their soft nests and put them on the table near Milly for examination. A smaller box inclosed she handed to Tom.

"You will appreciate these," she said. "And, indeed, they are worth all other gold and silver to me."

Tom threw back the cover and there lay a sparkling blaze of medals and clasps with their glowing ribbons.

"My father was a soldier," said Miss Hilson, "and he was neither neglected nor slighted by his country. Those are really valuable, and I should not keep them with me, but I like to look at them. I love their beauty as well as their meaning. These other things are less to me except for association with my mother's tea-parties at home."

They were old-fashioned, dainty little silver table service things of all sorts and of great age, one or two miniatures on ivory, and some rare ivory carvings, and some pieces of old lace, with a jeweled-bound missal, falling to pieces with age.

"Not an ordinary box full of treasures, Miss Hilson," said Mrs. Marsden. "If you had come empty-handed, we should have welcomed you, Tom, but it is useless to say that you would have brought as much genuine pleasure with you. This is certainly the cherished egg of the Stormy Petrel's Nest."

"Well, now, I must go back to my 'baby,' leaving it safe. I don't care ever to see Bay Bluff again—it has been like a nightmare to me for so long. I used to dream that some one was there before me, and digging up the box, and carrying it off, while I could not reach the spot or call loud enough to scare them or bring help. It's all off my mind now."

"And *on* to mine—with a difference," said Miss Hilson. "I mean what I say when I tell you I can never repay you, for I must always think that you were suspected, and sought for as a criminal all on my account. I shall owe you something all my life."

"You may strike a balance," said Mrs. Marsden, "for Tom may find this the open door to better fortunes. Those who suspect where innocence is afterwards proved are always more ready to atone by entire confidence and kindlier trust. Tom has never stood before his neighbors in the best light he deserved, and they will be glad to find he can stand its searching truth. There are bright days in store, Tom. Don't think of anything else. And go to Father Morgan—he is interested."

"Indeed, he was kind to me, and he did understand—everything."

"Good-by!" said Milly, holding out her hand on an impulse. He took it silently, and was gone in a moment more.

"Why did you say 'good-by,' Milly? That means you do not expect to see him again."

"I don't," said Milly, quietly. "He is free now, indeed. The boys are off his hands, and have worked out their own plans for a better time. He has proved himself a true man. Now he will go on to those dreams of his and their fulfilment. You will see he has done with Gray Beach—for the present, at least. I feel quite sure of it. How could he come back to that old hut and that one black pot with its endless stew? It would be impossible."

"Oh, do you believe the tale of the black pot and the endless stew?"

"Yes, I do believe it. I have learned since I came here that the impossible to me and to you and to all of us is quite possible to other people—and some of them very good sort of people. I came here for rest and

retirement, and I have found many things to serve me all my life. Haven't you, Mrs. Marsden? Haven't you, Miss Hilson?"

And both answered "Yes!" to her question with a decided emphasis.

CHAPTER XXII.

TREASURE TROVE.

MILLY was right. Tom Netterley was seen no more at Gray Beach. Father Morgan heard from him, and the Marsdens talked of him as a matter of course, so that his old neighbors had no opportunity to suspect him of other than "a rise in life" this time. Miss Hilson took pains to let it be known her box had been returned to her with all its contents, and that Tom had found it in the house at Bay Bluff in the closet of the wine cellar. Many of the searchers recalled the closet with its locked door—a lock so rusty and hinges so corroded they had not thought it worth while to open it, particularly as there was nothing in the cellar outside of it. The story that Tom had walked over to his father's old home while nursing Louis so near it, had wandered over it and pried into every corner even more carefully than others had done, was a perfectly natural one. It was just what would have happened in the case of an idle, energetic boy, in a place so familiar and so soon to be a part of a past that would be best forgotten. There was an honest rejoicing in every house at Gray Beach and The Point that Miss Hilson "had her own again," and that Tom was righted. There was quite a revolution of feeling regarding the Netterleys, and when Dan and Carroll came over, as they occasion-

ally did, they found a warm welcome everywhere. Louis was at Mass with the new father and mother every Sunday as soon as he was able to go—and a child is soon "able to go," even after a severe illness.

"Mother, you are always saying: 'A great deal may happen in a year.' It has taken less than a year to do away with the Netterley nuisance collectively and to turn some of the Netterleys individually into rather creditable members of society. Who would have believed it!"

It was Frank who thus expressed herself as she walked home with her mother from the first Mass at which they saw the little fellow, pale and thin, and very much taller, his red-gold curls making a halo around a really beautiful refined face, and his neat suit setting off a trim figure.

Mrs. Marsden only smiled in answer. She was thinking of the changes the year had wrought already in some other people, but she kept her thoughts to herself. Their subject was nearer home.

With January passed the last vestige of cold weather, and with February began a new and interesting period of their seaside sojourn. February is the month of all the year for a harvest of curious things on the beach. Not a day passed without some of the children rushing in with "a find," and buckets, pans, basins, coal-scuttles, were all pressed into the service of the ardent students of natural history. The king crabs, whose great shells are sometimes seen later in the year lying empty and ugly on the summer sands, began their career in February as tiny yet perfect, king crabs of less than half an inch in length all told, and delicately white and shining as small pearls. The sea anemones—they were the contents of the basins

—opened wonderful blossoms in pink and purple and closed them so suddenly Milly was not always sure she had really seen the beautiful flower. Annie Merton was a famous finder, and one day she came with a regular vegetable garden, "onions, radishes, lettuce and the cook's apron," as they said, examining them. But when the "onion" began to contract its transparent layers and shoot out long feelers around a ragged mouth, when the "radish" dragged itself out nearly a quarter of a yard across a great platter, its scarlet tail adhering to one side of the dish and the other end blindly wandering in search of something, when the "lettuce" and "the cook's apron" in water waved and floated as flakes of seaweed of some species, the girls felt as if they were in the midst of a Christmas pantomime, rather "creepy" than amusing. The shells were beautiful and there were many varieties never seen any other time. The crabs were endless. One day they found the very ugliest sea monster they had yet seen—a crab so old he was covered with a green moss and his eyes were glazed and staring but horribly spiteful. The books they were forever consulting had nothing to quite equal him, but they approached it nearest in the creature described by a small old primer as the "devil crab." Another day, when Milly went for a drive on the sands, the whole beach for miles was covered with round, shining, transparent disks.

"Oh, look at the preserve saucers!" she cried to the girls who were walking behind the carriage for a short distance. "There must have been a wreck and these are part of the cargo."

But they were "jelly fish," the villagers said—only

jelly-fish. Yet, they were so fantastically like a "preserve saucer" that there was a fine beading as in cut glass around the fluted divisions, and they were perfectly transparent. But they were solid, not concave, with a rounded surface. Milly had several of them put in the pony carriage on the floor, to take home to Mrs. Marsden, and there they speedily dissolved into clear water and disappeared.

With all the studies—and the girls tried hard to be conscientiously thorough in them—these wonders of the sea were never very carefully classified, and had always a lovely mystery and poetic fancy about them which they enjoyed quite as much as exact science, if not more. It is delightful, of course, to be learned, and in this age of superficial intellectual culture one must be half enthusiastic, or "one is nowhere;" but Milly frankly owned she did not care anything about it and it worried her. It was enough for her that the things were created, that she had seen them and that she should forever remember them as a token sent from their Creator, the All-Powerful and All-Able. Helena really liked the studies and gathered enough to make it ever after easier to pursue them. Frank was quite able for it, but gave herself little trouble. She said she had enough to do with the science of housekeeping, which she thoroughly enjoyed and was rapidly mastering.

And yet, they were such children in many things!

"Where on earth have you been?" asked Mrs. Marsden, almost in displeasure at their late appearance at the dinner-table one day.

"Oh, mother, we have been having such a jolly time!

We have been listening to the crabs squeal and provoking them to wrath of the worst kind. We have, truly !" as her mother looked at her blankly. "We were watching one of those little fellows bury himself, and when he was all safely under the sand, Frank tossed him out with her stick. He settled down again on another spot and dug away vigorously with his hind claws until he sank almost out of sight, then crossed his claws calmly over his head, and disappeared under the soft sand in that resigned posture. Frank scraped the sand away, and—will you believe it ?—he shook those claws in her face, and squealed with rage. It is absolutely true ! We have been prowling up and down the beach, looking for the tiny hillocks which mark the spot where a crab is buried, and when we found one we dug him out until he squealed. The first time they take it as an accident, and politely accept it without remonstrance. The second time they are ruffled, and some of them regularly furious. The third time usually brings the squeal when the second does not, but they are like other people, and some are patient for three or four raids. But the squeal and the clenched fists were sure to come in the end."

"Well, upon my word !" was all their mother could say. But for many days the squealing crabs, and the references to certain expressions of individual crabs, were most amusing and convincing of the "jolly time" they had that day. Milly was even introduced to some of the pugnacious creatures, and she certainly saw the "clenched fists" and the furious waving of claws when disturbed too often, but from her seat in the pony carriage or the chair she could not hear the squeal.

But the time seemed drawing near when she would walk. She could hardly believe it possible—she dare not hope. Her patience and self-control increased with each day, and, to those who only looked on, she did not seem to care very much about it. She could do so many things now, and she was so much stronger mentally, that the idea of helplessness ceased to be connected with her. But Helena knew of the "dark" hours, of the daily and strenuous efforts to "rise and go forth," of the secret longing and the countless deprivations of her apparently peaceful and luxurious life.

She certainly was much stronger, and she was conscious of a forgetfulness of her state which she thought was a proof of stronger nerves and a more natural condition.

"They say you are never conscious of your back and never think of it unless it pains you—that you just go on in a perfectly healthy state as if you were made of india rubber and springs. Well, I sometimes forget my back now. And I might surprise you all some day by forgetting my feet and walking off on them. But—I don't think I shall."

Albert shook his head slowly.

"Miss Milly," he said gravely, "don' you be a-countin' on no sich doin's. You dess sit still an' cum'fer'ble, an' de wings a-cumin'. Yass, dey is. You min' dat, now! But—you hain't a'goin' ter go no oder way. 'Ceptin' hit's hinder hoss or ole Albert's hinder yore cheer."

Milly sighed softly.

"I am afraid you see very clearly, Albert. I had better rest on your foreseeing. And when the wings do come—then it won't matter that I have waited."

To her father she never wrote despondently, but raised no false hopes. Long letters passed between them, and each had much to tell the other. She said, laughingly, it was a good thing for the correspondence that she was not at the boarding-house. Everything there went on the same, day after day, and she could never have had a thought nor a bit of news, for he never cared for news of *people.* Now there was always so much to tell she grew tired of writing.

Then Mrs. Marsden laughed.

"Milly, what a statement to make of Gray Beach! Think of the thousands of people who could not exist one day out of the season. What would they think if they heard that you found more to interest you here in the winter time than in such a boarding-house as your father kept you in? They would certainly write you down——"

"A mendacious spider—a spinner of yarns!" said Frank. "But, then, mother, they would change their minds if they had to spend a winter here. Don't you remember how the city people used to say that of life at Roseburn, when they came out for the summer? But it is only necessary to get them to spend one winter in the country—they never go back to the city unless they are obliged to go for business purposes. Look at the families around Roseburn who have come there within the last ten years. Wealthy people and poor people, and the middle-sized-income people, too. They come out to stay all year, and some one or two always grumble at the others who like it at first. Then they find out what it is to have a home instead of a brick hole in the wall like a city house, and then—they love it."

"Yes, you are right, Frank," said her mother, "a country life is a natural life, and next to that, life in a small town, where there are wide stretches and garden-plots of plants and trees and grass and shrubs. For brick walls and no sky shut out light from heart as well as body, and dwarf the whole nature, in too many cases. Great men and women have come to live in cities, but the really great and noble have always had a country experience at some time in their life. And now we are all coming to a knowledge of this. It is fashionable, even, to live in the country, and every one who can is setting his face that way. Hundreds of them are not fashionable, though. It is the love of better things than they have known which draws them."

"Dear Gray Beach!" said Helena.

"Yes," assented Milly, "that is just what it is. It has taught us all—although you were country girls—what it is to really live with nature."

"It is new," said Frank, "and Roseburn is so old it has settled. There are no discoveries to be made there—no such things as crabs who squeal."

"But I think I shall make discoveries when we go back," said Helena, "for that is one of the things I have learned here—how to make discoveries by close observation."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARCH WINDS.

All through those sunny February days, teeming with new life and enriched forever for the three girls by their gleanings, March must have been strengthening its forces in the Cave of the Winds, and preparing for a mighty struggle. Then, as if fully versed in the Julian calendar, it loosed them upon the earth with the first day of spring.

"Neber see such a March fust. Hit am two, free lions rolled inter one, an' hit roa's—bress goodness! But it do roa', suah."

Such was Albert's opinion when they asked him at breakfast what kind of a day it was out of doors. And he was right, for such "a March first" would be strange and new to any inland sojourner at the seaside. The waves were driven far up on the board-walk, poured over the floor of the pavilion and fell over the other side like a small cataract, while the foam flew as high as the roof of Ocean Cottage in myriads of tiny flakes like snow. The sun shone all day, but it was with a hard, cold glare that made the fields and woods, the long level marshes and the distant city look strangely bleak and unnatural. Milly could not, of course, go out of the house, not even to the porch. The girls ran down to the edge of the board-walk in spite of the terrific struggle to reach it, and stood cling-

ing to the flag-pole for a few minutes, awed and subdued by the majestic thunder of wind and waves which made it impossible to hear a word, although shrieked with all their strength. They went about the house all day after that, very quiet and thoughtful for such merry, chattering creatures, and Milly sat almost utterly silent in the window that gave the best view of that angry ocean.

After that, it was almost a continuous storm for two weeks. The rain fell at intervals in short, sharp bursts, the drops driving before the ceaseless blasts like slanting arrows. Now and then there was a cloudy day, and once or twice one of the glaring, bleak, shadeless days of cold sunshine, but always the wind roared and thundered, shrieked and sobbed.

"I declare, mother," said Frank, when she came into the dining-room on the morning of the fifteenth day of storm, "this is truly terrifying. Did you feel the house shake in the night? I thought of Jim Donny's story to frighten Albert. He said they had to' sit up to watch this house every night all last March to keep it from sliding off the beach, cause she'd go jest as easy as anything, she's so close.' It really seemed no exaggeration, and I fancied she moved once or twice."

"But 'she' didn't," said Milly, archly.

"No. But 'she' may, if this keeps on. The noise is worse than the tremor, though. I would give a great deal for an hour of perfect quiet. But, mother, what worries you? You are not paying the slightest attention to my complaints, and you are not usually so heartless."

"Well, dear, I think the storm has affected me, also. I am 'nervous,' I suppose, although I do not know the

meaning of the word as it is used so often. I cannot but think it strange that I have not heard from your father for so long a time."

"I have not had a letter for a long time, either," said Milly. "I was thinking about it this morning, and I concluded these winds must have had some effect on the mails."

Mrs. Marsden was silent. She had not mentioned at any time the anxiety that was oppressing her. Mr. Marsden had written to her alone that there was a faint prospect of a speedy conclusion to their business, so golden and glorious, however, that he hardly dared tell her, and she must not speak of it yet. If it became reality, he might see her as soon as the next letter could reach her. Oh, if he had started! If through all these fierce and angry waters he was making his way to destruction!

In vain she had combated her fears and fancies. She told herself over and over again that out of twenty vessels, all but one would probably come safe to port, and why should the one be his? She varied the proportions, she urged the continual traffic and the continual escapes from all dangers—always the thought pursued her, and she was daily growing more anxious.

What Milly had said turned the conversation into the channel of accidents and shipwrecks, and with an enjoyment as gloomy and peace-racking as the day, they pursued it into all sorts of out-of-the-way tracks, each repeating all she could recall of such stories, or describing pictures and paintings that had impressed their horrors on her mind. Miss Hilson seemed to have an endless store of them. Among others, she described a shipwreck that had occurred

at Gray Beach—or, rather, in which Gray Beach had a part—several years before.

"It was in March, and such a March as this. There was a young fellow—one of the pilots—who had just been promoted to Captain and given the command of one of the finest pilot-boats, and who had been engaged to one of the Gray Beach girls for some time. She was a pretty, lively young thing, and he was in every way worthy of a sweet wife, a cozy home and all the honors that he had won. They had intended for a year to be married as soon as this promotion came, and now, they had fixed the day. It was the fifteenth of March."

"To-day!" exclaimed Helena. "How strange we should hear his story on this day for the first time!"

Miss Hilson paused a minute.

"Surely! This is the fifteenth. And it really was very much such a day as this is. We all regretted that the sun should not shine on the bride, I remember, for although I did not know either of them, I was like every one else, very much interested in the young couple. They were married at noon—high noon—in a large Presbyterian church about five miles off, and the wedding was a large and gay one. After the service, they went home to the new house he had prepared for her, and a great many of the wedding guests went with them to help get the wedding supper ready, and to make a generally joyous and holiday time. But soon after they had reached their home—it was farther up the beach than Gray Beach—a messenger came for the groom. A ship was going out to sea and he was wanted as pilot. Now, I don't know why (for I never could get all the story clearly), and I always

thought it was strange they could not give a man his wedding day, but so it was. The messenger came and he went, expecting to return not later than midnight. But before sunset a terrible wind began to blow and increased to a perfect hurricane. Next day, portions of the broken wreck of the ship he had piloted to its end came ashore on this beach, but not a single body was ever seen."

"And the bride?" eagerly asked Frank.

"She has behaved well, Frank. She still lives in the home he left her. You have passed it many times in your drives. It is the white double cottage on Deal road, with the tall shining leaved shrubs in the little front yard. I think she mourned him sincerely, but she is placidly happy now."

"That was not a piece of the wreck we used to sit on, was it?"

"Oh, no! That was a wreck of long ago, in spite of Tom Netterley's belief. But they say *it* was a March wreck. The people have a greater dread of March than any other time of the year."

Mrs. Marsden left the room. She had sat as if fascinated, listening to the horrors she dreaded to recall, until she could bear it no longer. She must be alone and fight actively with her "foolish fears." When she came again among them she was her own quiet, bright self.

The day wore slowly on, growing gloomier and gloomier. At sunset—as in Miss Hilson's story—it became terrific, and with the increasing darkness, the wind rose higher and higher, and shrieked and howled more furiously. Not one of the family slept that night, for it rained heavily, and for the first time penetrated the roof and the very walls,

blown all ways by the changing gale, which shifted constantly.

Other noises than wind and sea seemed now and then to break the night, and Miss Hilson had some idea of their meaning, but she said nothing to the frightened girls nor Mrs. Marsden. At the first glimpse of dawn, however, she began her search from every window, and when the gray light grew, she saw a group on the beach not far from the life-saving station.

"There is a wreck!" she exclaimed. And as her sight grew more accustomed to the sea, she cried out with horror: "Oh, Merciful Heaven! what a wreck it is, indeed!"

Her cry was almost a shriek, and in an instant they were all around her except poor Milly.

It was close in shore—a great black hulk, tossing and sinking on the wild sea, washed by the tremendous waves, covered with the foam one minute and rising like a struggling animal far from the water the next moment. Yet she was very near. It did not seem possible that there, on their own beach, on the very sands they had lounged on and slept on and picnicked on, and sought for shells along it, and teased the crabs among its shallow pools —there she could be lost.

Albert had been knocking at the door several minutes before they could heed him in their excitement. He had been out, and came to beg the ladies to go to the beach. It was not raining, he said, and the wind was going down —it was only the sea that raged still. It was safe, and it was so wonderful they must see it.

In a very little time the two Marsden girls and Miss Hil-

son were ready to go, but Mrs. Marsden preferred to stay with Milly. A fear she could not cast off had again seized her, and as soon as she found herself alone with Milly, it broke forth.

"Oh, Milly—oh, my dear, my dear! do you think your father can be on that vessel? Did he say anything in his last letter about coming home? Oh, I am sure they are there, drowning before our eyes!"

"Mrs. Marsden, dear Mrs. Marsden!" cried the startled girl, opening her arms and taking the terrified lady into their close embrace, "they are no more there than you and I are out in the waves. Papa never has said a word about coming home until next fall at the earliest. Think a moment! He would not risk a March in this part of the world after such a winter as he has just passed. It would undo all the good the mountain air has done. This awful wind storm has even had an effect on you. I never expected to see you so frightened at nothing but your own shadow."

She was trembling herself, but she was full of courage, and she knew no mere trifle could have moved Mrs. Marsden. It quite alarmed her to think of the mischief the weather, or something as much beyond their control, had wrought in this serene and sensible nature. But her petting and her calmness had its effect, too, and Mrs. Marsden had collected herself, and was wiping her eyes and trying hard to smile at her "foolishness" in a very short time. But she could not bear to watch the struggling vessel, and stood in the shadow, saying little, but listening to every sound with strained ears.

Time passes quickly under such circumstances, al-

though it seems to drag. It was full daylight, it was eight o'clock, it was nine o'clock, and still the girls had not come in. The tide was going out now, and the vessel was not going with it. It still rolled, but it was evidently on the bottom now, and would be left high and dry when the tide was at its lowest. The crowd was increasing every moment, however, and the interest seemed to be as great as ever.

The maid came up to ask—in rather an injured tone—if cook might send in breakfast, and Mrs. Marsden, understanding the grievance, said at once to send it in for Miss Milly and herself, and, then, if they wished, they had better go to the beach to watch the wreck. The breakfast bell sounded so immediately that it was safe to conclude cook had already served it before Jane asked permission.

Milly went down and found Mrs. Marsden seated already, and busy in a mechanical way with cups and saucers. It was a silent meal for a few minutes. Then Mrs. Marsden sprang from her chair with such a cry, and of such strange meaning, that it sent a shock through Milly's whole being.

"My husband! Oh, my husband!"

The door was torn open, she flew through the hall, she was out on the porch.

Milly rose to her feet and followed her to see her clasped in the arms of a fine-looking man in a huge overcoat and furs.

"You are saved!" cried Mrs. Marsden. "Oh, how could it be?" And drawing back to look at him, "You are not even wet!"

"Why should I be, my dear? I have not been out in

the rain. Why, bless my soul! This will be good news for Aveling! My dear Miss Milly!"

And then it flashed upon them that Milly had walked —that she was—*could* she be—cured?

It was all a hurly-burly of amazement, a tremor of uncertain joy, a wonderful hour of speechless gratitude. Mrs. Marsden threw her arm around the girl and Mr. Marsden instinctively supported her on the other side, but she *walked* into the dining-room and sat down quite at her ease on an ordinary chair and put out her pretty little feet with a wondering, hopeful air of inspection.

"I don't know how I did it!" she exclaimed, looking from one to the other.

"I know!" said Mrs. Marsden in a low voice of awed conviction. "You 'arose and walked,' for our prayers have been heard."

Milly covered her face with her hands, and there was silence.

"Do you mean that she has not walked before?" presently asked Mr. Marsden.

"Never a step until I startled her so. I could not but cry out when I saw you through the windows. But how—where——"

Mrs. Marsden could not go on.

"I came down in the train to Brighton last night, but I could not get any one to bring me over at an earlier hour. Everything seems upside down in this out-of-the-way place. There is a wreck somewhere, it appears, but I had not time to find out particulars. I was too impatient to get to you and the girls. Where are they?" looking eagerly around at the door.

"They have gone to the wreck," said Mrs. Marsden in a blithe voice unlike the one Milly had listened to with such concern. "And, oh, I thought you had just come from it! I thought they had brought you ashore in the breeches-buoy!"

Then such a laugh as Mr. Marsden gave! And such a chorus as Mrs. Marsden and Milly made of it!

"What!" he cried, standing up and spreading out his arms—and a very handsome, stately figure, he was too—"Get into the breeches-buoy in this fine overcoat—the first I have had for years—and all these sables? Such extravagance not to be tolerated, my dear wife! I bought these only yesterday afternoon, when we got into New York, and I was half frozen in your winter climate. But," and his fine face grew grave enough, "where is this wreck? There may be some poor souls less fortunate than I was on board of her. We had a fearful passage and only God's mercy saved us from the same fate."

Mrs. Marsden hastened to point out from the porch the crowd on the beach, and he immediately started at a quick pace for the scene, while she returned to Milly.

She found her standing up—with clasped hands and such a reverent, grateful, loving look on her face as told its own story. Mrs. Marsden put her arms around her and kissed her tenderly.

"Your dear father!" she said, "if he had only been with Mr. Marsden, what joy it would have given him! We cannot get the news to him quickly enough."

"There will go other news with it," said Milly, softly. "I am cured! I promised that if I was cured as I dared to hope, I would ask at once to be received into the Cath-

olic Church. That is my first thought and my firm intention."

"My dear child!"

Mrs. Marsden could say no more.

Milly began testing her power, then, by short journeys from chair to chair, from window to door, from table to fireplace, and always without tremor or stiffness. Finally, the two stood side by side in the window, waiting impatiently for the return of the home-party.

It was not very long until they saw Albert scudding across the brown grass on the bluff, working his long arms and short legs like the telegraph machine at the Coast Station. They were both laughing heartily at his appearance when he burst in upon them without any preliminaries.

"Mis' Marsden, is you see him? Is you raly see him? He dar! Bress goodness he dar, suah as yore bo'n! I see him a-cumin', an' I dess run, I did. I ax you now, is dat he g'ostest? Is dat my Mistah Ed'ard? An' I know dat him, anyway."

"Yes, Albert, that is really your Mr. Edward. He came down last night to Brighton and——"

But Albert was gazing in terrified doubt at Milly. The poor old fellow turned of a dusky gray and "the beaded sweat stood on his brow."

"Miss Milly! Is—is—dat you?"

"Yes, Albert."

"Oh, bress goodness!"

It was a devout thanksgiving, and he sank on his knees, the tears rolling down his cheeks.

"Oh, Miss Milly! I didn't eber tink I see dis day.

An' Mistah Ed'ard yere too, de bery day de good Lord sen' His healin' angel. Bress goodness!"

He scrambled to his feet, half sobbing and half chuckling, flourishing his great yellow bandanna, and struggling to regain his usual deportment.

"I got no time to tarry," he muttered. "Dat dar table got ter be sot up scrumptious dis day; and ole Albert he got ter do it."

"But, Albert," called Mrs. Marsden after him, as he hurried out of the room, "what about the wreck? Is there any one on her? Can they do anything?"

"Oh, sho'! Mis' Marsden, neber see sich ole wreck! Not'in' ceptin' ole fruit baskit, an' ebery soul on her gone long ago. Dem station men tink dey lebe her fo' de big win' last night. An' she hain't no wreck nohow. She gwine lay up dar high an' dry 'bout noon, an' you kin hab all de o'anges an' lemonses I kin hook outen her ole carkess. Dar cum dem galses! An' dey don' know dere fader cum yit nor not'in'!"

They were spinning along with Miss Hilson, laughing and talking gaily, and not far behind them Mr. Marsden was hurrying up the Avenue from the beach. Milly withdrew from the window and sat down in her wheeled chair, her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkling. Every now and then, she pressed her hands together and lifted first one foot and then the other from the floor. She was cured!

Mrs. Marsden threw up the window and motioned to the girls to look behind them. The next instant with a joyful cry they had flown to their father, and Miss Hilson stood aghast at the spectacle of her companions raptur-

ously kissed and kissing in the face of all Gray Beach. But she knew, of course, who it was, and stepped sedately onward to her own room, where she closed the door on the happy family in whose joy she had no part but that of sympathizer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GOOD-BY!

It may be truly said that nothing had ever made such a stir at Gray Beach as did Milly Aveling's restoration to health. She had been a member of their community for nearly a year, and she had been truly a neighbor to all, one of themselves in sympathies and appreciation and in efforts to help each one bear the burden appointed to each. Her helplessness seemed only to intensify her desire to help every other soul she met, and to give her an added sense that taught an instinctive perception of the help each needed. The children had lived beside her, and she had shared their childish joys and sorrows, listened to their ambitions, finished out their plans for them, and continually taught them some good and gentle thing from her chair of bondage. They rejoiced in their own way, but they were shy and strange, too, as though it parted them already from their "own Miss Milly."

But she would not let them grow strange. She went everywhere and she called on them for so much of their time and attention that they soon forgot she had ever been unable to climb and walk and search and gather as well as any of them. She confided in them as she had ever done, and they knew as well as any to whom she attributed her cure, and the thank-offering she intended to make. She

had a simple, straightforward, reverent way of speaking that impressed its meaning on even a child's mind, and fell in with the home-life as though she had always had her place there as a Catholic child.

Letters had been written at once to Mr. Aveling by Mr. Marsden and Mrs. Marsden as well as Milly, and the answers were eagerly looked for. Milly had asked that she alone might tell him what she wished to do, and they willingly left it to her pen, while there was no stinted measure of sympathetic congratulation from them, and of loving appreciation of her sweet and noble character, newly revealed in her acceptance of a great joy as it had been displayed under a great affliction.

Mr. Marsden had brought wonderfully good news, when he found time to tell it all. The business he had planned and carried forward unaided had been so improved and enlarged by Mr. Aveling's engaging in it with hearty approval and support as to bring it prominently before the public and the government. Jealous of foreigners thus profiting by what they might secure to themselves at the cost of some sacrifices in the present to be repaid in the future, the most advantageous offers had been made, and urged repeatedly on a rising scale, by the government. Mr. Aveling was satisfied with regaining his health and anxious to be free to return to his child at the first moment possible, since he had lost the hope of her coming to him in her protracted helplessness. Mr. Marsden was satisfied with the reward of his labors, and open-eyed to a brilliant prospect it would lead to in his own country. The final offer had been made and accepted just in time for him to take the steamer on which his next letter would have been

forwarded. Mr. Aveling's letter he brought with him, as well as treasures of beautiful things for the beloved child for whom he pined.

"Yes, Miss Milly, I will say that—your father pines for you, and will never have a happy moment until he is with you once more. I am sure the news of your restoration will be worth all the other good news he ever heard. And he will let you have your way, too, I think. We have had many a talk together on many a matter of serious nature. He's a noble fellow, out and out, just, reasonable and conscientious. But he is quite well again. Never saw such a country in my life! Every air you breathe strengthens you and raises your spirits, but the mountain air is healing and perfume and nourishment and balm all in one—a regular elixir!"

The girls and their mother laughed at his enthusiasm, but he persisted in it, and declared he intended to take them all out there for a pleasure trip before the end of the year. Mr. Aveling thought of coming home the next fall, as the summer in the mountains would "toughen his lungs," as Mr. Marsden expressed it, but now that Milly could go with them, they would all go out and spend the winter, coming home in the spring.

"But a little later than this," he said, "for I shall never consent to risk the spring winds at sea after this experience. And I want to know if you don't all feel like packing up and going home with me to Roseburn? You've had a year of acclimation, you know, but I am homesick, I own. What do you say?"

There was a long silence. One looked at the other.

"What do you say, Miss Milly? It is for you to say, I

know, for you are the one concerned in the question of Gray Beach air."

"I think any air of my native land will serve now, and I hope to try some foreign breezes as well. But—I must own I do not want to lose sight of Gray Beach, my first real home place!"

"That you need not do. Your father intends to buy Ocean Cottage for another of your toys. I am commissioned to see to it as soon as possible."

"Oh, how glad I am! Then we need not give it up at all. We can keep it open and come and go as we wish, and loan it to our friends when they are ill or tired. I couldn't stay here all the year round by myself, you know, and you are all ready to go back to Roseburn, now that you have helped me to new life. Oh, I never can thank you enough for it—all!"

She hesitated a little before the last word, and they felt its full meaning.

Thus it was settled that they were to return to Roseburn, Milly quite as one of themselves, but that "the flitting" should be a lengthy process. Frank and her father went up in a day or so to see to the opening of the Roseburn house—Frank said she was determined her mother should not get a firm hold on the reins again, now that she knew how to keep house and liked it better every day—while Mrs. Marsden and Helena closed accounts, settled all business and social demands, and made new paths for Milly in the future. Then Mrs. Marsden and Albert departed with the cook. Milly and Helena were the last to go, keeping Miss Hilson with them until the last, and having a cozy time in the balmy April days with the maid

to do all they needed for their simple fare and tidy house. Miss Hilson was going when they went, to spend the few weeks of the year she always gave to city life, and which she usually took from the long winter nights and short winter days they had this year made so pleasant for her.

It was the day before they were to leave. The two girls were strolling slowly on the beach, stopping often to turn in their progress and look seaward or landward with long, fond gaze.

"You love it, don't you, Milly?"

"Yes, I dearly love it. It has brought me so much—this sea and this sky. Oh, the thoughts that have come to me out of them—the thoughts I have sent upward to one over the other! You know, there is nothing between us and Our Lord here—nothing at all. And it seems a so much fitter place for Him, if the day should come for Him to appear. Of course, Helena, I know these are only feelings and thoughts, and they are not to build on, but they have helped me, and I am thankful for them. I will not think such things in the future, perhaps, for the time for dreaming is over now. But while we have senses and feelings, and are weak and young, it is not wrong, is it, to be glad of places and people and thoughts that make it easier to be good and to bear suffering and all our crosses patiently?"

"I—don't—know," answered Helena slowly. "We had best ask Father Morgan."

"Oh, yes, of course! I shall ask and I shall then know exactly what is right to think. But, Helena, I have to ask you these questions about right and wrong as practise. I could not get them into the words that express my meaning exactly if I didn't talk things over with you.

And I'm not afraid to talk things over with you, because you are sure that I mean to do what is right and to think as the Church teaches. And all these things I have found at Gray Beach!"

"I have found a great deal here, too," said Helena. "It seems more than a year since we came, and, yet, one month has been more like every other month than ever before. If we had not had the snow-storm and the March winds, it would have been summer all the year."

"And the snow-storm and the March winds brought us more than the other months all put together. That is, of the things one can tell and count up. I am sure there has not been a day I have not grown, and, I do hope, grown upward. Do you think I have done anything for anybody but myself? It ought to have been a busy year for other people, and I have been an idle creature."

"You are wrong in that, dear Milly!" said Miss Hilson, whom they had been walking to meet, and who had heard the last sentence. "I will tell you frankly on this last night of our home life together that you have wasted no time and have sown seeds of truth broadcast. I go to and fro upon the earth, you know, and gather in the harvest others sow very often. And old Mrs. Herbert said to-day, while speaking out of a full heart of the comfort Leila is to her, that she could never, never be thankful enough for dear Miss Milly, so helpless and so helpful from the first day she came to Gray Beach."

"Helpless and helpful!" repeated Milly that night as she stood in her own room alone, looking out into the moonlit beauty of sea and sky. "Was that the true reading of my cross and the bearing of it? Oh, I hope

it was, although I did not know it. I wanted it to be, but —was it ? "

And the sea and the sky and the wind and the stars would have answered if they spoke, "It was." And every little child, sinking to sleep with a heavy heart, from Leila in her comfortable sky-chamber to Alissa in her trundle-bed with three to share it ; from Jimmy Donny with the weight of the store-basket on his mind to Louis Netterley asleep in the moonlight without a care or a sorrow beyond the morrow's parting with "our own Miss Milly," would gently and understandingly have answered, "It was." And mothers and fathers, anxious and yearworn, the lonely souls from Miss Hilson to "ole Mis' Pushcart" they too would have had but one answer, "It was."

Helpless and helpful !

Such indeed was Milly Aveling's record of a year—such her cross and the bearing of it.

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